DEVELOPMENT TRUSTS ASSOCIATION
transforming communities for good

A history of community asset ownership

by Steve Wyler

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Introduction

In the last few years community ownership of land and buildings has become, alongside social enterprise, a hot topic across the political spectrum, evidenced by manifesto promises, government reports and White Papers, enabling legislation, regulation and guidance, new investment funds, community right to buy legislation in Scotland, a review by the Welsh Assembly and an Asset Transfer Unit for England.

Despite continuing resistance from state municipalists and free-market fanatics alike, practice has kept pace with the promise. Within the expanding development trusts movement there now exists nearly £500m of assets in community ownership – empty and derelict buildings transformed into busy workspace, training rooms, conference centres, community run shops and restaurants, affordable housing, wasteland reclaimed for parks, community woodland, farms and allotments.

An idea whose time has come? If so, it has been a long time coming.

For hundreds of years the idea of community owned assets has run like a golden thread though our social history. Generation after generation, people have called for a different way of doing things, where land and buildings would belong neither to private landowners nor to the state, but would be held instead in trust and controlled by local communities, to provide amenities and create prosperity for the common good.

If we go back far enough, communities really did own their assets – indeed there was a time when community ownership of land in particular was not the exception, but rather the rule.

Free born Englishmen

Once land belonged to 'free-born Englishmen', but after 1066 the Norman invaders took the best of it for themselves. Even then, the peasants retained access to the unfenced commons, and remained in some respects a self governing community. In the wake of the Black Death, in which a third of the entire population of England perished, came the social upheavals that culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, bringing with it new and radical ideas.

Before 1066 land in England was owned not by wealthy landlords, nor by the state, nor even by the monarchy, but rather by free peasant proprietors, or 'coerls'. Each family cultivated its own smallholding and undertook communal activities within their own village. The ceorl was an independent 'free born Englishman', subject only to the king, to whom he had to provide military service when required, and the only tax was an annual food rent, a quantity of provision sufficient to maintain the king and his retinue for a day.

This system was beginning to break down even before the Norman conquest. The Saxon kings rewarded supporters by making them 'thegns' or territorial lords, and bestowed charters transferring to the thegns the rights of claiming military service and food rent from the peasants. In some places, when harvests failed, thegns would take over land in return for providing relief from hardship, and were paid in labour instead of food rent. But extensive common lands remained, and all the people of a district or village shared the right to these lands.

The Norman yoke

The Norman occupation changed all this. After his victory William the Conqueror handed out the land of England as spoils of war to his mercenaries, and as a result, ownership of land was no longer absolute, but rested on permission of the king, the ultimate owner. Parts of the kingdom were kept by William for himself 'in demesne', and the rest was divided among about 180 barons, on the understanding they would provide knights for battle when the need arose. In turn the barons retained a portion of the land allotted to them as their own demesne and divided the

rest among knights, each of whom was under a military obligation to the barons (and thus to the king). The churches and monasteries also retained demesne lands and sub-let the rest of their holdings.

As for the conquered Saxons, they became serfs: survival in exchange for servitude. Where the population resisted they were annihilated, and their villages burnt, and for decades after 1066 great swathes of England especially in the North remained depopulated. The nobility, naturally, kept the best land themselves. Villagers were required to give up a set number of days to work the lord's demesne land, and to serve as foot soldiers if there was war. There were many other rights and obligations, varying from place to place, more often preserved by custom than written into formal statute. The village peasants were obliged to grind their corn at the lord's mill, and if they wanted to marry, they would first have to beg the lord's permission, and pay a tribute.

But though in relation to the lord of the manor they were serfs, in relation to each other the peasants were in many respects a self-governing community. In most places, the landscape they worked was very unlike that of modern rural England. There were no hedges or fences; the cultivated land was a single large open field, and every year a communal gathering of villagers at the manor-court or court-leet would allot to each man several narrow strips, taking care to share out the good and bad land equally, and on these narrow strips each villager tried to grow enough food to feed himself and his family.

The nobility were expected to provide basic assistance in cases where the poor became ill, or a man died and left a widow and children. Anyone who did not work or who committed a transgression was punished, or outlawed and left to starve to death in the woods or wastelands. A rudimentary legal system did provide some limited safeguards for the common people, and above all 'habeas corpus' ensured that no man could be held in prison without being charged and put on trial by a jury of his peers. But the lord held power in his manor, and was, in practice, judge, jury and executioner. Moreover, there was also the church, which claimed its tithes from the poor, made its own laws and held its own courts, made certain that the common people remained illiterate, controlled public and private morality, and built splendid cathedrals.

The commons

Beyond the open field was unenclosed common land where the villagers had rights, granted not by statute but by immemorial custom, to cut the long grass to make hay, to gather fuel from the woodland, or to graze their cattle if they had any. There were also vast forests, but these belonged to the king and only the king and his nobility were allowed to hunt the deer, wild boar, rabbits, and other game. Poaching was a national sport, but punishable by death.

This system was, to a degree, sustainable. The villagers were allowed to gather wood for fuel, but only twigs and branches they could reach with a shepherd's crook or a haymaker's hook, and therefore the woodlands were not destroyed and would continue, winter after winter, providing fuel for the poor. It was nevertheless a subsistence economy. The villagers on their narrow strips, with rudimentary implements and limited farming methods, could barely grow enough to feed themselves. There was little travel or trade between communities, let alone nations. What wealth the king and barons gathered to themselves was more often the pillage of war (the main purpose of the later crusades) than the produce of local economies. Only the monasteries grew rich, and were hated for it.

The Black Death

The Black Death changed everything. It arrived in England in 1348, landing at Melcombe in Weymouth bay and spreading rapidly across the country. A third or more of the population perished, causing immense distress and social upheaval However, because of labour shortages, the working people who survived found themselves everywhere in a stronger economic position than before. A class of free yeoman farmers emerged, who paid rent on land and cattle, and in turn offered employment to farm labourers. There was rapid transition towards a wage economy, and bonds which for centuries had tied peasant workers to the villages in which they were born were broken. Itinerant workers and their families moved from village to village selling their labour, with neither the restraints nor protections of the feudal system.

Wages were driven ever higher. Inevitably there were attempts to restore control, and laws were passed to limit wage levels. Suddenly the economy was booming. There was expansion in sheep farming and wool production,

initially exported as a raw commodity to the continent. Soon thousands of small village enterprises were producing the finest woollen cloth in Europe, and the wool merchants became the greatest power in the land. Other forms of trade flourished, above all local markets, where travelling entrepreneurs would sell household goods and the latest luxuries. These markets also offered amusements, adding liveliness to a society still living in the shadow of death – the plague was to return to afflict each generation for another three hundred years.

In this new world there was vastly more opportunity and wealth, but also growing division between the wealthy and the poor. Those left behind had no safety net. With large profits to be made from wool, the old nobility and the rising merchant classes started to replace arable farmland with pasture, and worse, to encroach on common land, starting the long process of fencing and hedging that was to destroy the subsistence economy, depopulate villages, and drive the poor off the land and into the towns. Often they did this without legal sanction, in outright defiance of the laws. And yet it happened all the same, and the poor seemed powerless to prevent it.

The Peasants' Revolt

In 1381, thirty three years after the first outbreak of the Black Death, the king decided to impose a new tax. He needed cash to finance foreign adventures, and the rudimentary taxation system was no longer providing sufficient income to satisfy the lifestyle of the king and his court. For the first time, the central government decided to impose a tax directly on all citizens, and worse, this poll tax required everyone, rich or poor, to pay the same amount. This injustice added fuel to the fire in an already volatile society. At the villages of Fobbing and Brentwood in Essex, villagers decided not to pay, and forced tax collectors to flee. Resistance spread rapidly, and the Peasants' Revolt was underway.

Radical clergymen and craftsmen took the side of the common people. Pre-eminent among them was John Ball, a renegade priest, and when the rebels gathered at Blackheath on the outskirts of London, John Ball addressed them:

When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, he would

have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.

In June 1381 the rebels marched into London, occupied the city, and struck off the heads of the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Treasurer, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The rebels expected that the boy king Richard II would listen to their grievances, and treat them with justice. The king, accompanied by the Mayor of London and a group of armed retainers, rode out to meet the peasant army which was camped at Smithfield under the leadership of Wat Tyler. There are different versions of what happened next, but the Anonimalle Chronicle tells us something of the hopes of the peasants. Like John Ball, Wat Tyler called for all people to be treated by the State as equal under the law, demanding that 'there should be no outlawry in any process of law, and that no lord should have lordship save civilly, and that there should be equality among all people save only the king.'

Wat Tyler went even further, attacking the abuses of the church and calling for church land and buildings to be returned to the people: 'all the lands and tenements now led by them [the bishops] should be confiscated, and divided among the commons, only reserving for them a reasonable sustenance.' And finally he called for an end to the feudal system of peasant bondage, insisting that 'there should be no more villeins in England, and no serfdom or villeinage, but that all men should be free and of one condition.'[1]

Wat Tyler did not have to wait long to receive his answer. He was stabbed to death by the Lord Mayor's retinue. The furious peasants drew back their bowstrings, but the boy king had the presence of mind to save his life by a promise that he would agree to all the demands. The mayor then rushed for reinforcements, and the leaderless rebellion, mollified by the king's promises, dispersed. When the immediate threat had passed, the king and the nobility turned to vengeance. Walsingham, in *Historia Anglicana*, records the king as announcing: 'Serfs you were and serfs you are; you shall remain in bondage, not such as you have hitherto been subject to, but incomparably viler.' This time, he kept his word.

Wat Tyler meets his death at Smithfield

Desolation and wilderness

Time and time again people rose in rebellion against the injustice of land enclosures. In 1513 a turner in a fool's coat wandered through the City of London calling for shovels and spades, and Londoners threw down enclosures around the city. In 1516 Thomas More's *Utopia* castigated the wealthy for the misery caused by enclosure of land, and renewed the demand for all property to be held in common. In 1549 the largest popular uprising of all took place in Norfolk where Robert Kett and 15,000 rebels assembled on Mousehold Common outside Norwich, and drew up a manifesto for justice and community ownership.

Shovels and spades

After the failure of the Peasants' Revolt, the encroachment by merchants and nobility upon commonly owned land continued, creating bands of landless workers and widespread vagrancy, and generating discontent and further outbreaks of rebellion. Occasionally there were small and temporary victories, for example in London in 1513, as Edward Hall's Chronicle records:

... the inhabitants of the towns about London, as Iseldon [Islington], Hoxton, Shoreditch, and others, had so enclosed the common fields with hedges and ditches, that neither the young men of the city might shoot, nor the ancient persons walk for their pleasures in those fields, but that either their bows and arrows were taken away or broken, or the honest persons arrested or indicted; saying 'that no Londoner ought to go out of the city, but in the highways.'

This saying so grieved the Londoners, that suddenly this year a great number of the city assembled themselves in a morning, and a turner in a fool's coat, came crying through the city, 'Shovels and spades! Shovels and spades!' So many of the people followed that it was a wonder to behold. And within a short space, all the hedges about the city were cast down, and the ditches filled up, and everything made plain, such was the diligence of these workmen.[2]

The King demanded an explanation. The authorities complained of the 'injury and annoying' done by the protesters to the

landowners, but King's council after some deliberation decided not to take action, 'after which time these fields were never hedged'.

Thomas More's *Utopia*

The English humanism which flourished in the 1500s cast fresh eyes on fundamental questions of human behaviour and social organisation, and among the most prominent of this generation of philosophers and scientists was Thomas More. In 1516 he wrote his famous work, *Utopia*, in which he denounced the injustice of land enclosures:

They enclose all in pastures; they throw down houses; they pluck down towns; and leave nothing standing but only the church, to make of it a sheep-house. And, as though you lost no small quantity of ground by forests; chases, lands and parks; these good holy men turn all dwelling places and all glebeland into desolation and wilderness.

Therefore, that one covetous and insatiable cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and enclose many thousand acres of ground together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own...

All their household stuff, which is very little worth, though it might well abide the sale, yet being suddenly thrust out, they be constrained to sell it for a thing of nought. And when they have, wandering about, soon spent that, what can they else do but steal, and then justly, God wot, be hanged, or else go about abegging? And yet then also they be cast in prison as vagabonds, because they go about and work not; whom no man will set a work, though they never so willingly offer themselves thereto.

Thomas More claimed that the poor were more worthy to enjoy goods and property than the rich 'because the rich men be covetous, crafty, and unprofitable: on the other part, the poor be lowly, simple, and by their daily labour more profitable to the common wealth than to themselves.' More believed that individual property ownership was a great cause of distress, and in *Utopia* would be abolished:

Setting all upon a level was the only way to make a nation happy, which cannot be obtained so long as there is property: for when every man draws to himself all that he can compass, by one title or another, it must needs follow, that how plentiful so ever a nation may be, yet a few dividing the wealth of it among themselves, the rest must fall into indigence.

The society proposed in *Utopia* was ruled by a Prince and had many authoritarian features. Order and discipline were more important than liberty, and for women especially this was no earthly paradise. But there was religious tolerance, and private possessions were not allowed. Everyone (men and women) would work for only six hours a day, and everyone would learn a particular skill:

Besides agriculture, which is so common to them all, every man has some peculiar trade to which he applies himself, such as the manufacture of wool, or flax, masonry, smith's work, or carpenter's work.

One feature of *Utopia*, which featured in many later community experiments, was that everyone had the option to eat communally, but was not compelled to do so:

Though any that will may eat at home, yet none does it willingly, since it is both ridiculous and foolish for any to give themselves the trouble to make ready an ill dinner at home, when there is a much more plentiful one made ready for him so near hand.

Thomas More later became Lord Chancellor, fell out with Henry VIII, and was executed, but *Utopia* remained as a beacon for radical dissent for three centuries.

Robert Kett and the rebellion of the commons

The greatest popular rebellion against the illegal land enclosures took place in 1549, and started when villagers in Wymondham in Norfolk held a festival to commemorate Thomas a Becket. The festival was itself an act of defiance, for as everyone knew, Becket was a saint and had been murdered by the henchmen of a king. Indeed, the villagers had good reason to be angry. The local landowners were fencing in open fields on which the villagers depended for their livelihood. Deprived of common land for crops and grazing and fuel, and with no means to seek justice in the courts, the peasants had grown desperate.

On that summer's day they marched towards the estate of John Flowerdew, a notorious landowner. Flowerdew was clever and bribed the crowd not to tear down his fences, but rather to tear down the fences of a neighbour he disliked, Robert Kett. So the mob marched in that direction. Then something unexpected happened. When he heard their grievances, Kett listened and joined them, even helping to tear down his own

fences. Indeed he became their leader. On 9 July 1549 Kett led the crowd to Norwich, at that time the second city of the kingdom. The gates were barred, so they set up camp below the city walls, on Mousehold Heath. In a few days, over 15,000 people had gathered. They tore down enclosures around the city. The Mayor of Norwich offered bribes and pardons for the crowd to disperse, but the people rejected all offers; they were determined to settle for nothing less than justice itself, determined not to 'endure such great shame, as, living out our days under such inconveniences, we should leave the Commonwealth unto our posterity, mourning and miserable, and much worse than we received it of our fathers.'

They believed that if they gave way, oppression would gather pace: 'Shall they, as they have brought hedges against common pastures, inclose with their intolerable lusts also, all the commodities and please of this life, which Nature the parent of us all, would have common, and bringeth forth every day for us, as well as for them?'

Robert Kett and the Tree of Reformation

Under a spreading oak tree on Mousehold Heath, which they named the Oak of Reformation, Kett and his council of rebel leaders met. From here they controlled the great crowd, ensuring supplies of provisions and keeping order. On 24th July the insurgents attacked the walled city, armed with nothing more than pitchforks, sticks and mud. After a fierce struggle they entered the city and took control.

The rebels believed that if the king would learn of their grievances, he would provide redress. After all, the tyrant Henry VIII was dead and his son, the boy Edward VI, was young and as yet uncorrupted. So under the Oak of Reformation the people drew up their demands:

We pray your grace that no lord of no manor shall common upon the Commons.

We pray your grace to take all liberty of let into your own hands whereby all men may quietly enjoy their commons with all profits.

We pray that all bond men may be made free for god made all free with his precious blood shedding.

We pray that Rivers may be free and common to all men for fishing and passage.

We pray that the poor mariners or Fisherman may have the whole profits of their fishings as purpres grampes whales or any great fish so it be not prejudicial to your grace.

We pray that it be not lawful to the lords of any manor to purchase land freely and to let them out again by copy of court roll to their great advaunchement and to the undoing of your poor subjects.

We pray that every proprietary parson or vicar having a benefice of £10 or more by year shall either by themselves or by some other person teach poor men's children of their parish the book called the cathakysme and the primer.

The petition was sent down to London and the great crowd on Mousehold Heath waited for the answer. Eventually, the King and his Protectors offered promises and pardons to appease the rebels, but at the same time they raised an army to hunt them down and destroy them. The first attack by 14,000 soldiers was beaten off. A second attack, led by the infamous Earl of Warwick, was a different matter. Three thousand rebels were slaughtered and thrown into a mass unmarked grave, the greatest ever massacre of English citizens by an English army. Robert Kett was captured

a few days later, tortured, convicted of treason, and hung over the side of Norfolk Castle, as an example. Other rebels were treated in similar fashion. The branches of the Oak of Reformation were hung with bodies.

History is a tale told by the victorious. Contemporary accounts are all but silent about this uprising against the theft of common land. There was no monument to mark the rebellion, no gravestones to show where the dead lay buried. It was as if it had never happened.

The story of Kett was not revived until two hundred and fifty years later, when as we shall see, Thomas Spence and Tom Paine were proclaiming that the theft of the commons from the people was the root cause of poverty in the new industrial age. By the 1790s Mousehold Heath, the site of the rebellion, had itself fallen victim to enclosures by wealthy landowners, and by then enclosures were legalised by Acts of Parliament. In the 1800s paintings of Mousehold Heath appeared by John Crome and John Sell Cotman. In these paintings the heath remains unenclosed. Paths, open to all, wander though a lovely wilderness, under wide skies. Here is a celebration of the world Kett's rebels fought for, a freedom, once cherished, now forever lost.

A few years later John Clare, the peasant poet, wrote:

Unbounded freedom ruled the
wandering scene;
No fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect from the gazing eye;
Its only bondage was the circling sky.

A mighty flat, undwarfed by
bush and tree,
Spread its faint shadow of immensity,
And lost itself, which seemed to
eke its bounds
In the blue mist the horizon's
edge surrounds.

Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours,
Free as spring clods and wild
as forest flowers,
Is faded all – a hope that blossomed free,
And hath been once as it no
more shall be.
Enclosure came, and trampled
on the grave
Of labour's rights, and left the poor a slave.

Fence meeting fence in owner's
little bounds
Of field and meadow, large as
garden-grounds,
In little parcels little minds to please,
With men and flocks imprisoned,
ill at ease.

Each little tyrant with his little sign
Shows where man claims earth glows
no more divine;
But paths to freedom and to
childhood dear
A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'.
(*The Moors*, c 1824-25)

Forgotten again for a century and more, much of Mousehold Heath was submerged within the expanding suburbs of the city of Norwich. In the 1960s, the municipal masters of Norwich cut down the Oak of Reformation, to make way for a car park.

Mousehold Heath by John Sell Cotman, c1810 © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

Levellers and ranters and diggers

Despite the failure of Kett's rebellion, More's assertion that 'setting all upon a level was the only way to make a nation happy' was not easily suppressed. In 1607 across the Midlands great crowds gathered, led by the mysterious 'Captain Pouch', to throw down the hated fences. In the 1640's Levellers such as Richard Overton called for enclosed lands to be returned to the poor, and Ranters such as Abiezer Coppe kissed beggars in the street and cried out that that the day was fast approaching when all things would be held in common. In 1649 Gerrard Winstanley and a small band of Diggers occupied a patch of waste land on St George's Hill in Surrey, to 'work together, eat bread together', in the belief that 'the Earth ought to be a common Treasury to all'.

Captain Pouch

The story of Captain Pouch is found in the *Annales of England*, published in 1632:

About the middle of this month of May 1607, a great number of common persons suddenly assembled themselves in Northamptonshire, and then others of a like nature assembled themselves in Warwickshire, and some in Leicestershire, they violently cut and break down hedges, filled up ditches, and laid open all such enclosures of commons or other grounds as they found enclosed, which of ancient time had been open and employed to tillage, these tumultuous persons in Northamptonshire, Warwick and Leicestershire grew very strong, being in some places of men, women and children a thousand together, and at Hill Norton in Warwickshire there were three thousand, and at Cottesbich here assembled of men, women and children to the number of full five thousand.[3]

The protesters said that it had been 'credibly reported unto them by many that of late years there were three hundred and fifty towns decayed and depopulated, and that they supposed by this insurrection and casting down of enclosures to cause reformation.' A gibbet was set up in the city of

Leicester as a warning not to get involved. It was torn down by the people.

These riotous persons bent all their strength to level and lay open enclosures without exercising any manner of force or violence upon any man's persons, goods or cattle, and wheresoever they came, they were generally relieved by the near inhabitants, who sent them not only carts laden with victual, but also good store of spades and shovels...

The rebels appeared to be well organised, but the leadership was at first a mystery:

At first these foresaid multitudes assembled themselves without any particular head or guide, then started up a base fellow named John Reynoldes, whom they surnamed Captain Pouch because of a great leather pouch which he wore by his side. He said there was sufficient matter to defend them against all comers, but afterwards when he was apprehended his pouch was searched, and therein was only a piece of green cheese.

The landowners, in particular the Treshams, raised an army and with the encouragement of the king suppressed the rebellion. Forty peasants were killed in a battle at the village of Newton in Northamptonshire. The rebels were indicted with High Treason and several were executed, including Captain Pouch, who was 'made exemplary.'

At Newton, a contemporary account by the Earl of Shrewsbury reported that the protesters called themselves 'levellers'. Others described themselves as 'diggers'. The diggers of Warwickshire issued a proclamation to all other diggers:

Wee, as members of the whole, doe feele the smarte of these incroaching Tirants, which would grind our flesh upon the whetstone of poverty, and make our loyall hearts to faint with breathing, so that they may dwell by themselves in the midst of theyr heards of fatt weathers [herds of fat wethers].[4]

The Levellers: setting all things straight

These first levellers and diggers were easily suppressed, but not for good, and forty years later the terms re-emerged with increased vigour. In October 1647, in the celebrated Putney debates, Colonel Thomas Rainsborough stood before the assembled Grandees of Parliament, and declared, 'For I really think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to

live, as the greatest he.' Rainsborough was the spokesman at Putney for the Levellers, a political movement that derived support from soldiers in several regiments of Cromwell's New Model Army, and radical tradesmen in the City of London. The intention of the Levellers was to 'set all things straight, and to raise a party and community in the kingdom.'

General Ireton for the Grandees replied to Rainsborough. Only those with a 'permanent fixed interest [ie owning land] in this kingdom,' he argued, should have a part in disposing of the kingdom's affairs. But the Levellers were determined that the English revolution should not overthrow a tyranny of kings only to see it replaced by a tyranny of landed gentry. A year earlier Richard Overton had pleaded, 'let not the greatest peers in the land be more respected with you than so many old bellows-winders, broom-men, cobblers, tinkers, or chimney-sweepers, who are all equally freeborn.'[5] Overton called for enclosed lands to be returned to the people:

That all grounds which anciently lay in Common for the poor, and are now impropriate, inclosed and fenced in, may forthwith (in whose hands soever they are) be cast out, and laid open again to the free and common use and benefit of the poor.[6]

In the main Leveller manifesto, the principle demands were for an extension of voting rights to everyone over 21 (except that is for beggars, servants, Royalists, and women), annual Parliaments with an elected representative for every 400 people, the application of laws equally to all people, and freedom of religious conscience.

They also proposed that all taxes should be abolished, saving only a tax on land: 'an equal rate in the pound on every reall and personall estate in the Nation.'[7] However, in their manifesto, the Levellers were careful to dissociate themselves from more radical demands which they claimed would 'level men's Estates, destroy Property, or make all things Common.' This was a reference to the programme of the 'True Levellers', known also as the 'Diggers'.

Abiezer Coppe the ranter

The Ranters, as their enemies called them, also flourished during the English Civil War. They were social revolutionaries and mystics, convinced that the only divinity was to be found within the individual human being. They also believed that those in possession of such divinity were free spirits for whom absolutely nothing, however unconventional or shocking, could be sinful.

The most celebrated of all the Ranters was a renegade Anabaptist preacher named Abiezer Coppe (1619-1672). He identified himself with the most destitute, the most wretched, the most oppressed:

Mine eares are filled brim full with cryes of poore prisoners, Newgate, Ludgate cryes (of late) are seldome out on mine eares. Those dolefull cryes, Bread, bread, bread for the Lords sake, pierce mine eares, and heart, I can no longer forbeare.[8]

Coppe advocated an extreme form of levelling, where all property would be relinquished by the individual, and everything would be held in common.

Give, give, give, give up, give up your houses, horses, goods, gold, Lands, give up, account nothing your own, have ALL THINGS common, or els the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have.

He believed that the new millennium was imminent, in which property rights would be abolished, social equality would flourish, and the divinity inherent in mankind would find full expression:

It's but yet a little while, and the strongest, yea, the seemingly purest propriety [property], which may mostly plead priviledge and Prerogative from Scripture, and carnall reason; shall be confounded and plagued into community and universality. And ther's a most glorious design in it: and equality, community, and universall love; shall be in request to the utter confounding of abominable pride, murther, hypocrisie, tyranny and oppression, &c.[9]

Coppe rejected both 'sword-levelling' and 'digging-levelling' in favour of an ecstatic spiritual rebirth which would be achieved by direct and intense social interaction with the common people. So he made a point of swearing, kissing beggars in the streets, consorting with gypsies, living promiscuously, and confounding 'plaguy holiness and righteousness' by 'skipping, leaping, dancing, like one of the fools.' For Coppe the man of sin was a 'brisk, spruce, neat, self-seeking, fine finiking fellow.'

Coppe rejected the pomp and ritual of all organised religion in favour of a life based on the most simple and direct communitarian principles: 'The true breaking of bread – is from house to house, &c. Neighbours [in singleness of heart] saying if I have any bread, &c. it's thine, I will not call it mine own, it's common. These are true Communicants, and this is the true breaking of bread among men.'[10]

This was dangerous stuff, condemned on all sides. Coppe was imprisoned and twice forced to publish recantations (although contemporary accounts doubted their sincerity). He died in 1672, of illnesses produced by 'drinking and whoring', as his enemies reported.

Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers

On April Fool's day in 1649 half a dozen men began to dig common land at St George's Hill, Weybridge, in Surrey. Their leader, Gerrard Winstanley, was a bankrupt cloth merchant turned cattle herdsman, who claimed he had received a divine injunction that people should 'work together; eat bread together'.

The numbers tripled within a week. They called themselves True Levellers and soon became known simply as the Diggers. They were arrested and locked in a church, released and locked up again. An angry neighbour said, 'They invite all to come and help them, and promise them meat, drink and clothes. They do threaten to pull down and level all park pales, and lay open, and intend to plant there very shortly... It is feared they have some design in hand.' They certainly did, and within weeks Winstanley published a pamphlet to explain his 'design':

The earth (which was made to be a Common Treasury of relief for all, both Beasts and Men) was hedged in to In-closures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made Servants and Slaves: And that Earth that is within this Creation made a Common Store-house for all, is bought and sold, and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonoured, as if he were a respector of persons, delighting in the comfortable Livelihoods of some, and rejoycing in the miserable povertie and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so.[11]

The plan at St George's Hill was to 'lay the Foundation of making the Earth a Common Treasury for All, both Rich and Poor... Not Inclosing any part into any particular hand, but all as one man, working together, and feeding together as Sons of one Father, members of one Family; not one Lording over another, but all looking upon each other, as equals in the Creation.' St George's Hill was to be only the beginning: Winstanley envisaged a vast series of collective communities: 'not only this Common, or Heath should be taken in and Manured by the People, but all the Commons and waste Ground in England, and in the whole World, shall be taken in by the People.'

Once in possession of their birthright, the people will never let it go: 'wheresoever there is a People, thus united by Common Community of livelihood into Oneness, it will become the strongest Land in the World, for then they will be as one man to defend their Inheritance.' War and division would cease: 'Propriety [property] and single Interest, divides the People of a land, and the whole world into Parties, and is the cause of all Wars and Bloudshed, and Contention every where.'

Winstanley and his follower William Everard were summoned to Whitehall to be questioned by Lord Fairfax, the army chief. They stood before Fairfax with their hats on, and when asked why they did this, they replied, 'Because he was but their fellow creature.' They proclaimed, 'what they did was to restore the ancient community of enjoying the fruits of the earth, and to distribute the benefits thereof to the poor and needy, and to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked.'

Back on St George's Hill, when the Diggers tried to cut and sell wood on the common land, their horses were attacked by local landowners. Then 'divers men in women's apparele on foot, with every one a staffe or club' attacked the Diggers. When this failed to dislodge them, the landlords took to the courts. Bailiffs confiscated the cows, but wellwishers recovered them. Winstanley then moved the community to Cobham Manor, built four houses and prepared the land for a crop of winter grain. But troops were sent in October and November and on the second occasion they pulled down the houses. The Diggers built themselves 'some few little hutches like calf-cribs', and slept there at night, continuing to plant wheat and rye, 'counting it a great happiness to be persecuted for righteousnesse sake, by the Priests and Professors.'

They denied slanders that they were thieves or that they held women in common: 'I own this to be a truth, That the earth ought to be a common Treasury to all; but as for women, Let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband,' said Winstanley. They survived the winter and by April 1650 had sown eleven acres of corn and had built seven houses. The vicar of Horsley sent a group of men to demolish one of the houses, ill-treating the occupier's pregnant wife, who suffered a miscarriage.

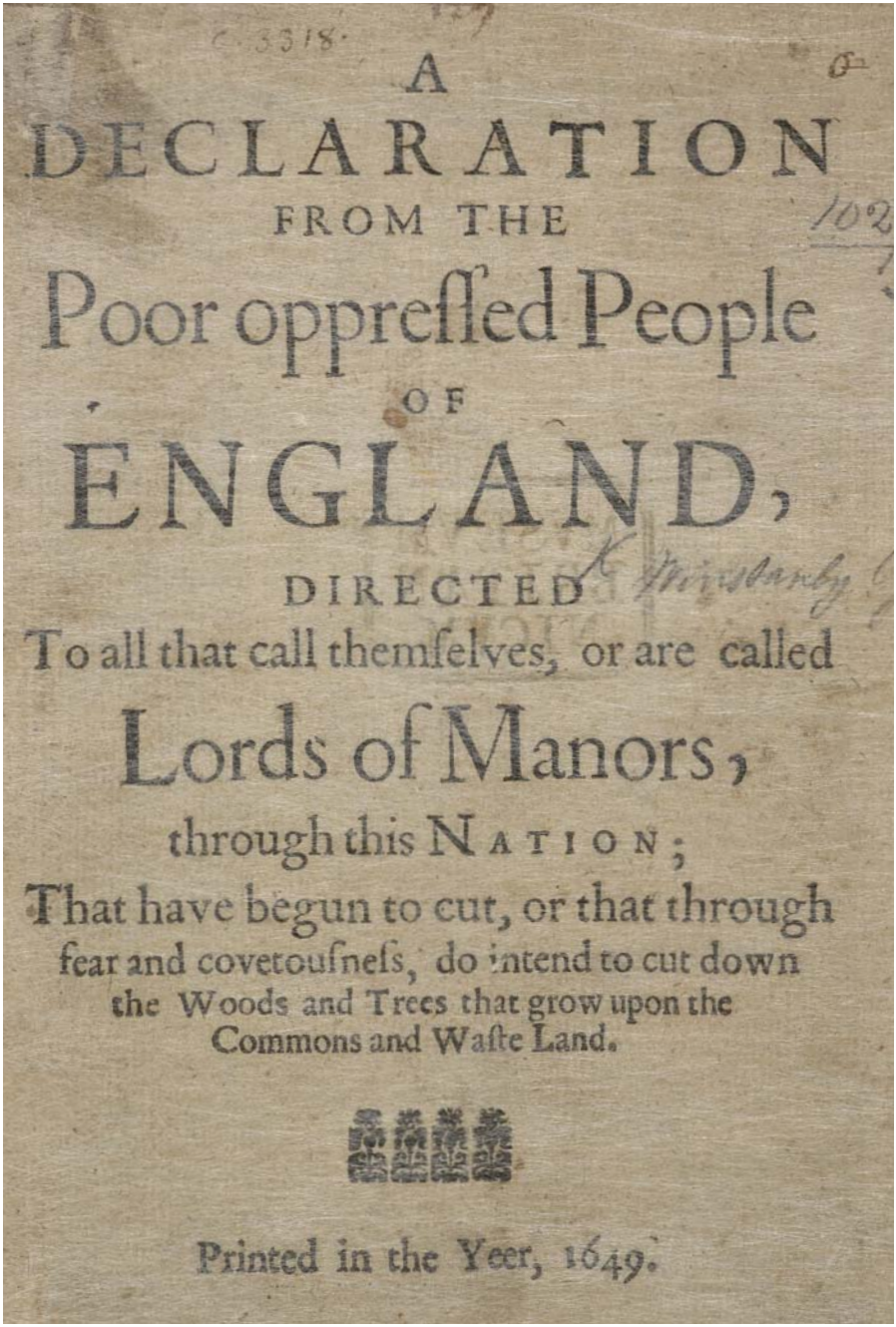
Winstanley tried to negotiate a settlement, promising that the Diggers would not cut wood on the common if the neighbours would not pull down their houses. But on Easter Friday they were attacked by fifty

men, who burnt down the houses and scattered their belongings across the common. In frustration Winstanley wrote that if the Diggers beg 'they whip them by their Law for vagrants, if they steal they hang them; and if they set themselves to plant the Common for a livelihood, that they may neither beg nor steale, and whereby England is inriched, yet they will not suffer them to do this neither.' The settlement was destroyed but Winstanley remained defiant. 'And now they cry out the Diggers are routed, and they rang bells for joy; but stay Gentlemen, your selves are routed, and you have lost your Crown, and the poor Diggers have won the Crown of glory.'

Meantime at Wellingborough in Northampton, where over a thousand inhabitants were receiving alms and public relief, nine men led by Richard Smith began 'to bestow their righteous labour upon the common land at Bareshanke.' They resolved not to dig up any man's property 'until they freely give it us' and they were pleased to discover that 'there were not wanting those that did.' Other Digger colonies were established at Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, Cox Hall in Kent, Iver in Buckinghamshire, Barnet in Hertfordshire, Enfield in Middlesex, Dunstable in Bedfordshire, Bosworth in Leicestershire, and at other sites in Gloucestershire and Nottinghamshire.

In 1649 Winstanley claimed that 'Reason requires that every man should live upon the increase of the earth comfortably,' asserting that half or two thirds of the land of England was not properly cultivated: 'If the waste land of England were manured by her children, it would become in a few years the richest, the strongest and [most] flourishing land in the world.'[12] This went beyond an attempt to defend traditional commoner rights against those who argued, perhaps correctly, that more intensive farming methods were needed to supply the needs of the growing population. Winstanley argued that collective cultivation of the land by the poor, as an alternative to expropriation by the rich, could generate both prosperity and social justice.

His plan for social reformation was set out in 1652 in his greatest work: *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*.[13] Here he states his quest: 'The great searching of heart in these days is to find out where true freedom lies, that the commonwealth of England might be established in peace.' The solution lies in the restoration of common land to the



A
DECLARATION
FROM THE
Poor oppreſſed People
OF
ENGLAND,
DIRECTED
To all that call themſelves, or are called
Lords of Manors,
through this NATION;
That have begun to cut, or that through
fear and covetouſneſs, do intend to cut down
the Woods and Trees that grow upon the
Commons and Waſte Land.

Printed in the Yeer, 1649.

community as a whole: 'True freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth.' Winstanley proposed that all land confiscated from royalists and from the dissolution of the monasteries a century earlier should be added to a commonwealth land fund. Private ownership of land or the produce of the land would be abolished (although families would retain ownership of their houses and property within it), money would disappear, and communal storehouses would be set up:

Every tradesman shall fetch materials, as leather, wool, flax, corn and the like, from the public store-houses, to work upon without buying and selling; and when particular works are made, as cloth, shoes, hats and the like, the tradesmen shall bring these particular works to particular shops, as it is now in practice, without buying and selling. And every family as they want such things as they cannot make, they shall go to these shops and fetch without money.

Commerce, he believed, would thrive under such arrangements:

Every man shall be brought up in trades and labours, and all trades shall be maintained with more improvement, to the enriching of the commonwealth.

Elected councils would govern at local levels, and these would send elected representatives to national government. As in Thomas More's Utopia, there would be no lawyers. Education would be universal and enable men and women to discover the 'secrets of Nature and Creation within which all true knowledge is wrapped up.' No one would work beyond the age of forty.

Winstanley recognized that it was no easy thing for people to live together harmoniously in a community. He accepted that in any parish 'the body of the people are confused and disordered, because some are wise, some foolish, some subtle and cunning to deceive, others plain-hearted, some strong, some weak, some rash, angry, some mild and quiet-spirited.' Therefore 'peacemakers' would be annually elected in every parish 'to prevent troubles and to preserve common peace.'

Similarly, elected 'overseers' would maintain order and ensure effective production and exchange: 'they are to see that particular tradesmen, as weavers of linen and woollen cloth, spinners, smiths, hatters, glovers and such like, do bring in their works into the shops appointed; and they are to see that the shops and storehouses within their

several circuits be kept still furnished: [and] that when families of other trades want such commodities as they cannot make, they may go to the shops and storehouses where such commodities are, and receive them for their use without buying or selling.'

The third type of elected officer in every parish would be the 'postmasters'. These would keep monthly records of events and transactions within the parish, and share these records with other parishes and with the nation as a whole. This would allow all communities to assist each other in the case of disaster, avoid mistakes that others had made, and share discoveries and innovations:

The benefit lies here, that if any part of the land be visited with plague, famine, invasion or insurrection, or any casualties, the other parts of the land may have speedy knowledge, and send relief.

And if any accident fall out through unreasonable action or careless neglect, other parts of the land may thereby be made watchful to prevent like danger.

Or if any through industry or ripeness of understanding have found out any secret in nature, or new invention in any art or trade or in the tillage of the earth, or such like, whereby the commonwealth may more flourish in peace and plenty, for which virtues those persons received honour in the places where they dwelt:

When other parts of the land hear of it, many thereby will be encouraged to employ their reason and industry to do the like, that so in time there will not be any secret in nature which now lies hid (by reason of the iron age of kingly oppressing government) but by some or other will be brought to light, to the beauty of our commonwealth.

Winstanley's proposals were dismissed, and the Diggers were rapidly and ruthlessly suppressed by the aspiring landowners within Cromwell's Protectorate. The restoration of Charles II was followed by the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 in which, though the monarchy's powers were limited, the landowning classes took political and economic control. Exactly what the Levellers and Diggers had most feared had come to pass, and the 'common treasury' was once again denied to the people.

The people's farm

In 1775 the schoolmaster Thomas Spence gave a lecture to the Newcastle Philosophical Society which set out a vision of a new millennium, where poverty would be at an end and social justice would reign, founded on community ownership of land and community self-government. Spence's ideas contributed to the ferment of radicalism that flourished in the years following the French Revolution. In 1791 appeared Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* followed by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men*, and a few years later by Paine's *Agrarian Justice*. William Blake's poem 'London' expressed the social desolation of a 'charter'd' urban landscape.

Thomas Spence

In 1775 Thomas Spence, an impoverished schoolmaster, delivered and published a lecture to the Newcastle Philosophical Society. 'The Real Rights of Man', was the title of his lecture, and Spence's thesis was that poverty and injustice in an age of rapidly increasing material prosperity were the direct consequence of theft from the people of land, their common inheritance. Spence's 'Plan' would restore this inheritance.

A day would be appointed on which all land would be reclaimed by the people, and pass into ownership and control of parish corporations. Land would then be leased out to the highest bidders, and rental income would replace all other taxation. Every parish would be self-governing, and would set its own laws, and every adult (women as well as men) with residence of a year would enjoy full citizenship rights.

Money raised locally by land taxation could provide for relief of the poor, universal education, roads, canals, hospitals, schools, 'planting and taking in waste ground', and training local citizens in the use of arms. A small proportion of the tax would be sent to national government (representatives would be elected annually by every parish). Government would not interfere in local laws and decisions, except where these threatened the 'rights and liberties of mankind'.

There would be sufficient income for all the needs of society, because there would be no need for an expensive

centralised officialdom: in Spence's scheme 'the government, which may be said to be the greatest mouth, having neither excisemen, custom-house men, collectors, army, pensioners, bribery, nor such like ruination vermin to maintain, is soon satisfied.' If someone were to arrive in need from a foreign land, they should be provided with relief by the parish, but the cost should be defrayed from the parish contribution to the national exchequer. Thus, refugees would be helped, but not looked upon with 'an envious eye.' Any funds left over would be distributed as equal dividends to all members of the population, the elderly and infants included. Free trade and manufacture, a flourishing agriculture, and localised democracy would combine to raise the nation to a high moral level, a people's Jubilee.

Spence spoke out for the emancipation of women as well as men: he declared that women not only knew their rights 'but have spirit to assert them.' He even proposed that in every parish a committee of women (rather than their 'gallant lock-jawed spouses and paramours') would manage the business of collecting rental income and commissioning public works. The 'end of society is common happiness', declared the first article of Spence's proposed Constitution.

He believed in minimal government, and that people should be allowed to live freely, provided only that they do not restrict the rights of other people: 'liberty is that power which belongs to a man which does not hurt the rights of another.'[14]

Spence was not hostile to personal wealth. He told the wealthy that they would be allowed to keep 'all your moveable riches and wealth, all your gold and silver, your rich clothes and furniture, your corn and cattle, and everything that does not appertain to the land as a fixture'.[15] He believed that commerce would thrive under his system: 'the uncommon freedom, and security of property in such a happy state would operate as a stimulus rather than a check to industry.' A multitude of small tradesmen would replace monopolising corporations, for 'great, avaricious monopolising companies... for their private ends, disturb the peace of the whole world, setting nation against nation, and people against people.'[16]

In 1792 Spence travelled to London and set up a street stall on Chancery Lane. He sold a rum punch, distributed radical propaganda. He also produced trade tokens, with slogans and images to spread his messages. On one, a bonfire

of land deeds signals the end of oppression. Sometimes Spence would sell his tokens, sometimes he would scatter them into the London crowd.

Frequently imprisoned, Thomas Spence never gave up, and attracted a group of dedicated followers – small groups of working men, including the Black radical Robert Wedderburn, the son of a Jamaican slave. The Spenceans met in pubs, chalked slogans on the walls: 'Spence's Plan and Full Bellies', 'The Land is the People's Farm'. In 1801 they inspired bread riots.

Spence died in 1814 and was buried by forty followers, and a Society of Spencean Philanthropists led by Wedderburn was formed. Wedderburn opened a Unitarian chapel in Hopkins Street, Soho and government spies reported that he was making 'violent, seditious, and bitterly anti-Christian Spencean speeches'. In 1817, Robert Wedderburn wrote 'The earth cannot be justly the private property of individuals, because it was never manufactured by man; therefore whoever sold it, sold that which was not his own.'[17] By 1819 up to 200 people were paying 6d. a head to attend debates, and 'lectures every Sabbath day on Theology, Morality, Natural Philosophy and Politics

A Spence token: a bonfire of land deeds signals the 'end of oppression'

by a self-taught West Indian'. Frustrated in their attempts to promote Spence's Plan through rational argument, the Society turned to armed insurrection. In 1820 after the fiasco of the Cato Street conspiracy (a bungled attempt to assassinate members of the government), its leaders were executed or transported.

Wedderburn himself opposed the conspiracy, but only because he thought it was premature. Eventually he was charged with blasphemous libel. In court he asked the jury: 'Where, after all, is my crime? It consists merely in having spoken in the same plain and homely language which Christ and his disciples uniformly used. There seems to be a conspiracy against the poor, to keep them in ignorance and superstition'. Found guilty he was sentenced to two years in Dorchester Prison. On his release Wedderburn continued to campaign for press freedom, against injustice, and for the ideas of Thomas Spence. In 1824 he published The Horrors of Slavery. In 1831, at the age of 68, he was arrested once more and sent to Giltspur Street Prison; four years later he died.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine

Spence's ideas found echoes among other radical writers of his generation. In 1790 Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* where she sketched a vision of society without extremes of wealth and poverty, where property is divided more equitably, and independent smallholders form the basis of the economy. She suggested that the 'industrious' peasant should be permitted to take over and cultivate unused land:

Why does the brown waste meet the traveller's view, when men want work? But commons cannot be enclosed without acts of parliament to increase the property of the rich! Why might not the industrious peasant be allowed to steal a farm from the heath?

In 1791 and 1792 appeared Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, in two parts. He pointed out that society can operate perfectly well without a centralised government of the few over the many:

The instant formal government is abolished, society begins to act: a general association takes place, and common interest produces common security.

How often is the natural propensity to society disturbed or destroyed by the operations of government! When the latter, instead of being ingrafted on the principles of the former, assumes to exist for itself, and acts by partialities of favour and oppression, it becomes the cause of the mischiefs it ought to prevent.

The Rights of Man was a bestseller, bought in installments in cheap editions by working class radicals through 'corresponding societies'. Soon both *The Rights of Man* and the corresponding societies were outlawed, and Paine was charged with seditious libel. Paine escaped and fled to France where he became a member of the Convention, but, falling into disfavour with the increasingly despotic revolutionaries, Paine was imprisoned and only narrowly escaped the guillotine. He made his way to the United States and, in 1797, wrote the most famous pamphlet of land reform: *Agrarian Justice.*

Paine's proposals were that all landowners should pay 'to the community a ground-rent' to be accumulated in a national fund. From this fund every person reaching the age of twenty one would receive a bounty of 'Fifteen Pounds Sterling to enable him, or her, to begin in the World.' He also called for a universal old age pension: all persons aged fifty or above would receive an annuity of £10 'to enable them to live in Old Age without Wretchedness, and go decently out of the world.'

However, Paine's proposals did not allow for local community ownership or control. The state, through the national fund, would provide for all. Thomas Spence saw the danger in this: in 1797 he accused Paine of promoting 'the sneaking unmanly spirit of conscious dependence':

Under the system of Agrarian Justice, the people will, as it were, sell their birthright for a mess of porridge, by accepting of a paltry consideration in lieu of their rights...

The people will become supine and careless in respect of public affairs, knowing the utmost they can receive of the public money.[18]

Above all Spence rejected Paine's confidence in a centralised state: 'instead of debating about mending the State' it would be better, claimed Spence, to 'employ our ingenuity nearer home':

The results of our debates [would appear] in every parish: how we shall work such a mine, make such a river navigable,

or improve such a waste. These things we are all immediately interested in and have each a vote in executing; and thus we are not mere spectators in the world, but as men ought to be, actors.[19]

This was the beginning of a debate which was to run through the chartist, socialist and co-operative movements. Would social reform be best accomplished through a national Parliament and a centralised state, or by means of largely autonomous local communities? Should all people play an active and determining role, as actors rather than spectators,or should authority and resources be controlled through a highly educated and professionalised elite? The debate remains as relevant and unresolved today as it was in the 1790s.

William Blake's 'Charter'd' London

In the poem 'London', which William Blake printed by hand in 1794 as one of his *Songs of Experience*,[20] the causes of poverty and the nature of the modern Babylon are identified: the theft of common land from the people, and the consequent debasement of social value by means of squalid commercialism:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames
does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

The first draft of this poem has survived in Blake's notebook, and from this we know that originally Blake used the phrase 'dirty street'. The substitution 'charter'd' changes everything. The historian E.P Thompson remarks that 'the word is standing at an intellectual and political cross-roads', producing not a single meaning but a series of associations.[21] For contemporary readers the word 'charter'd' might have invoked the mighty chartered companies such as the East India Company, whose ships set out from the Thames, and whose operations were at the time under attack in the radical press. The word also alluded to the Whig concept of freedom (chartered liberty, the Magna Carta), but for Blake this was no true freedom claimed as of right, but rather a debased freedom handed out by the powerful.As Paine had written in *The Rights of Man*:

It is a perversion of terms to say that a charter gives rights. It operates by a contrary effect—that of taking rights away. Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants; but charters, by annulling those rights in the majority, leave the right, by exclusion, in the hands of a few...

Above all the word ‘charter’d’ invokes the legalised theft of land from the people, by charter and Act of Parliament. In Blake’s lifetime the enclosure of common land was continuing at an unprecedented pace: during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries more than seven million acres of land were enclosed by a series of 4,200 private Acts and various general enclosure Acts.[22] The land (the ‘charter’d streets’) and even the rivers (the ‘charter’d Thames’) was once the birthright of the people, but had been expropriated by the rich and powerful. Blake explicitly linked the theft of land by charter to the distress of modern civilization, and the poem continues:

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear.
How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the
Marriage hearse.

Thompson points out that ‘Blake's "London" is not seen from without as spectacle. It is seen, or suffered, from within, by a Londoner.’ This is a poem whose ‘moral realism is so searching that it is raised to the intensity of apocalyptic vision.’ As the poem progresses the narrator takes the reader with him ever deeper into the sights and sounds of the desolate city. Commercial transactions and the institutions of the powerful destroy the human spirit, ultimately corrupting all that is created (‘the new-born infant’s tear’) and blighting all human attempts at unification (‘the Marriage hearse’).Later, Blake was to express the antithesis of this desolate vision as the reawakening and re-unification of ‘Albion’, the embodiment of England and of all mankind, and in his epic poem *Jerusalem* appears one of the finest articulations of the early co-operative or ‘socialist’ spirit:

In my Exchanges every Land
Shall walk, & mine in every Land,
Mutual shall build Jerusalem:
Both heart in heart & hand in hand.[23]

Villages of co-operation

In the early 1800s Robert Owen introduced reforms at New Lanark in Scotland and went on to establish a co-operative community at New Harmony in the United States. Owen's vision was of a society made up of a commonwealth of self-governing and self-sufficient 'villages of co-operation', each of around 1,000 people, where sectarian religious views would not be allowed to take hold, and industry and enterprise for the common good would provide prosperity for all. New Harmony was short lived but it stirred the imagination: many experiments followed and some such as Ralahine in Ireland held high promise. The first co-operative store was founded in Brighton by Dr William King in 1827, not as an end in itself but rather as a means to finance these 'socialist' communities.

In the early 1800's Robert Owen, a part-owner of cotton mills at New Lanark near Glasgow, became shocked at the conditions of the workforce and their families and resolved to do something about it. He believed that education was the solution, and opened a school at New Lanark which he described as an 'Institution for the Formation of Character.' At the school's opening ceremony he declared that 'no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment' to create a healthy society free of crime and poverty, 'except ignorance'.[24] Working class children (both girls and boys) were taught during the day and older children and adults in the evening; lessons included dancing, exercises, music and singing, and in summer excursions were made into the countryside.

The scheme attracted interest, and at first Owen expected that his example would be enthusiastically taken up by others within the ruling classes. This was not to be. However, a new opportunity came in 1817: alarmed by mass unemployment in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, and a rise in social unrest, the government was desperate for solutions. Owen was invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury and subsequently by a Parliamentary Committee on the Administration of the

Poor Laws to set out his ideas. In 1819 the Committee published a diagram of Owen's proposals inscribed 'A view and plan of the Agricultural Villages of Unity and Mutual Co-operation'.

Owen proposed that society should be transformed into a series of communities, with an ideal population of 800-1,200. Each was to be self-supporting and their members would be engaged in various branches of manufacture and agriculture. There should be enough land to supply the needs of the village, and to produce a surplus allowing trade with other communities. The villages would be located in the centre of farmland, and the layout would encourage a communal way of life. A parallelogram was proposed, avoiding traditional streets and alleys that Owen believed were damaging to health and a source of crime.

Owen's belief in the force of rational persuasion made him confident that capital to create the first communities would come from industrialists, landowners, parishes and counties, and groups of farmers, mechanics and tradesmen. However, the immediate reaction of the establishment was disappointing. While Owen indeed found several influential supporters including the Duke of Kent, the economist David Ricardo and Sir Robert Peel, he also encountered vehement opposition from others including Wilberforce and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. An attempt to establish a select committee to get the plan underway was heavily defeated by 141 votes to 17.

New Harmony

In November 1824 Owen turned his sights towards America. With $135,000 of his own money he purchased an existing colony in Indiana capable of housing 800 people. New Harmony, as the colony was renamed, would become the model for a 'New Moral World'. Here, Owen adopted the ideas of Josiah Warren, an American anarchist who lived for a while at New Harmony and other Owenite communities, and who had set up the first time store. Labour was to be the new currency, and New Harmony produced its own banknotes representing hours of labour.

Owen was determined that New Harmony should exert an educative force not just on its own inhabitants but on society at large. The key was to attract scientists of the highest calibre and in this Owen was remarkably successful. In 1826 William Maclure, a wealthy Scottish geologist and educationalist, sent out his private library, philosophical

instruments, and collections of natural history. These were accompanied by a party of scientific associates, including the geologist Gerhard Troost and the naturalists Charles Lesueur and Thomas Say. They travelled together to New Harmony by keel-boat from Pittsburgh - a 'boat-load of knowledge'.

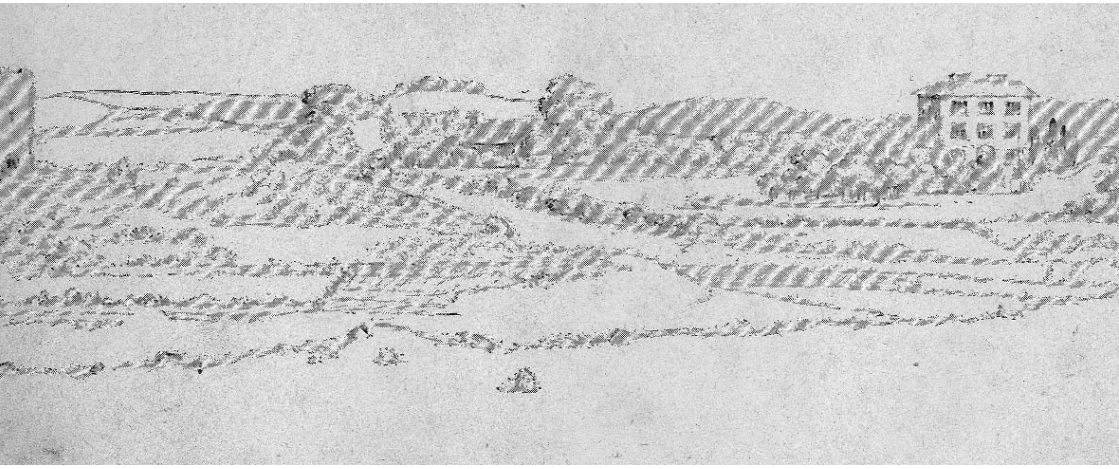
Maclure's aim was to make New Harmony the 'centre of education in the west'. His enthusiasm had a deep impact on Owen's sons, and one of them, David Dale Owen, became a prominent geologist. The young Abraham Lincoln saw the colonists pass up the river on their way to New Harmony and unsuccessfully begged his father to let him join them.

Early co-operative communities

Owen's ideas and activities in the United States stimulated a series of further experiments. Some were ill-conceived and quickly vanished, but all contributed to a growing pool of skills and knowledge. In Spa Fields in London in the 1820s Owen's followers took steps to research and measure social impacts; at Orbiston in Scotland a substantial community was established; early attempts at co-operation in Devon were begun but soon abandoned; a colony at Graveley near Brighton had more success. At Manea Fen near Cambridge, a settlement which Owen discouraged, a windmill was erected named Tidd Pratt, in honour of the Registrar of Friendly Societies (the windmill was completed on the day the community received its certificate of incorporation).

The most promising of the early Owenite experiments was at Ralahine in County Clare. In 1831, in an attempt to prevent secret societies from recruiting his discontented tenants, an Irish landowner John Vandeleur persuaded an Owenite socialist Thomas Craig to establish a co-operative society on his estate of 618 acres at Ralahine in County Clare. When Craig arrived he learned that the previous manager had been shot dead by the tenants, and Craig was greeted by an anonymous note in which was depicted a skull and crossbones, together with a warning that he too would soon be put to bed under the 'daisy quilt'.

Nevertheless, it was not long before the tenants were won over by Craig's proposals. The community established by Craig consisted of forty-six people and was self-governing: a managing committee of nine was elected twice a year. The aims of the New System,



Ralahine, County Clare

as it became known at Ralahine, were to acquire common wealth to protect members against the evils of old age and sickness, to achieve mental and moral improvement of adults, and to educate children. Alcohol, tobacco and snuff were banned, as was gambling of any kind. The members of the community had to work twelve hours a day in summer and from dawn to dusk in winter, with a one hour break for dinner. They ate meals together, and a school was established.

Instead of money the workers were paid in cardboard vouchers representing a day's work, worth 8d and about the size of a gentleman's visiting card. Fractions of these down to sixteenths were recognized and so were multiples, and they could be spent in the co-operative store which provided healthy and unadulterated food, thus ensuring that wealth as far as possible remained in circulation within the community. If the members wished to spend money outside the commune they could exchange the labour notes for coin. All members of the community over the age of seventeen took a share in the division of profits. The estate prospered and a further twenty nine people joined. New machinery was bought and the first mowing machine in Ireland was introduced.

After two years, however, the experiment collapsed, but through no fault of the community itself. The landowner Vandeleur lost all his possessions through gambling, and because he had retained ownership of the estate (the community paid an annual rent) the land was seized and the community was evicted. The members met for the last time on 23 November 1833 and placed on record a declaration of 'the contentment, peace and happiness they had experienced for two years under the arrangements introduced by Mr. Vandeleur and Mr. Craig and which through no fault of the Association was now at an end.'

Ralahine remained a beacon of hope. Seventy years later Alfred Russell Wallace praised its practice of self-government: 'it was found that the most ignorant of labourers were sometimes able to make suggestions of value to the community... it shows that sufficient business capacity does exist among very humble men as soon as they have the opportunity of practising it.'[25]

A new moral world

The movement was seething with ideas, not all of them practical. In 1834 a letter was published in Owen's magazine the *New Moral World* proposing a 'Floating Co-operative Community' which was moored on the Thames, where it was thought the inhabitants would be safe from the extortions of retail traders, lodging-house keepers, and gin shops. In the same year it was reported that community coffee-houses existed in London.

Owen himself suggested that the government should purchase the new railways and the land by the side of them up to six miles broad so that communities could be established as the railways developed, thus capturing increased land value for public benefit. The suggestion was, unfortunately, not acted upon.

In New Harmony, Owen had proposed a new role for women. With child-rearing, cooking and washing transferred to the community, women could play a role in factories and gardens, and take an equal share in communal tasks. Owen also took a reformist position on marriage, attacking impediments to divorce, and for this he was much condemned by the establishment. Owen was not the first to combine the political and social emancipation of women with proposals for a society based on small communities – Mary Wollstonecraft in 1790[26] and Thomas Spence in 1797[27] had sketched out just such a vision. But it was Owen and his followers who were to develop

these ideas further and indeed attempt to put them into practice. The atheist Emma Martin believed that only Owenite socialism could remove the great evil of the 'depraved and ignorant condition of women',[28] and William Thompson saw in co-operative communities the means to achieve perfect equality between men and women:

This scheme of social happiness is the only one which will completely and for ever ensure the perfect equality and entire reciprocity of happiness between women and men.[29]

In practice, Owenite communities fell short of perfection; while women usually had voting rights within the communities, and benefited from education on an equal basis, the communities remained largely male-dominated, and the apportionment of labour often resulted in women working longer hours.[30]

Co-operative trading

The Owenite experiments gave birth to a movement of co-operative stores. In 1827 Dr William King became convinced that a co-operative shop could provide the money to finance a community, and set one up in Brighton for this purpose. This was the beginning of the co-operative stores movement.[31] Just three years later it was reported that already 300 were operating across the country. A co-operative journal *Common Sense* described the purpose of a trading association:

The object of a Trading Association is briefly this: to furnish most of the articles of food in ordinary consumption to its members, and to accumulate a fund for the purpose of renting land for cultivation, and the formation thereon of a co-operative community.[32]

But often the stores became an end in themselves, and the original impulse, to provide finance for new Owenite communities, was lost, and many of the stores failed.

In 1844 new life was imparted into this movement by a group of 28 weavers and other working people who set up 'The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers' opening a small grocery store in Toad Lane, selling only unadulterated goods. They invented a new form of business, whereby the customer became a partner in the rewards of mutual endeavour: they refused to give credit to customers, but for the first time paid them a share of profits (a 'dividend'). The Rules of the Society became a

model for others, and within a decade there were nearly 1,000 co-operative stores operating on similar principles across the country.

As with the first co-operative stores the aim was to create fully self-supporting communities, on land which they themselves would own:

As a further benefit and security to the members of this society. the society shall purchase or rent an estate or estates of land, which shall be cultivated by the members who may be out of employment, or whose labour may be badly remunerated.

That as soon as practicable, this society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education, and government, or in other words to establish a self-supporting home-colony or united interests, or assist other societies in establishing such colonies.[33]

The Society encountered many problems in its formative years, but the characters of the initial pioneers were decisive in overcoming these problems, and not least of their qualities was humour:

Of the 'Famous Twenty-eight' old Pioneers, who founded the store by their humble subscriptions of twopence a week, James Smithies was its earliest secretary and counsellor... In the presence of his vivacity no one could despond, confronted by his buoyant humour no one could be angry. He laughed the store out of despair into prosperity.

His 'laugh was like a festival,' and he kept the movement 'merry in its struggling years'.[34] A descendent, Keith Smithies, works at the Development Trusts Association today.

The true socialism?

The term socialism today usually implies a political system in which the state takes centre stage, nationalising land and other natural resources, directing manufacturing and commercial activities, and using wealth produced by the people to provide them with goods and welfare services according to their needs. The original use of the term was very different, indeed was wholly opposed to the notion of a dominant controlling state. The first documented use of 'socialist' in the Oxford English Dictionary is in a letter in *The Cooperative Magazine*, London, November 1827. There it referred to the ideas propagated by Robert Owen and his followers

that society should consist of a federation of self-governing and largely self-sufficient communities.

When many of the early co-operative experiments failed, others started to look towards action by central government rather than local communities to establish common or mutual ownership. For some the way to achieve this was through universal suffrage and political control of Parliament. For others the route to socialism was through armed insurrection and mass revolution. But either way the goal was to seize power at the centre and direct the resources of the nation, through machineries of command and control. Marx and Engels wanted to use the term socialist rather than communist in their 1848 manifesto, but they realised it would have created a confusion with the Owenite version which was at that time still current, though soon to be overshadowed by the Marxist usage and a little later by that of the Fabians.

The Fabians constructed a model of socialism which they claimed could be achieved through a programme of nationalisation and delivery of welfare services directed by national government, with some tasks delegated to local municipalities elected by the people, but with effective control in the hands of those who knew best, the professional classes. A long way indeed from the original socialist vision that working people could live and prosper in self-governing and co-operative communities, where *they* exercised ownership and control.

Communities built by working people

William Thompson, economist and advocate for feminism, believed that finance for co-operative communities would need to come from the working classes themselves, and they should have full ownership of their assets. Such ideas were drawn on by early trade unionists, and in the 1840s in the Potteries, and in the Sheffield steelworks, trade unions raised money from working people, to establish rural communities in England and in America. The greatest experiment of this kind was undertaken by the Chartist Feargus O'Connor, who founded five working class communities from 1846 to 1848, all with investment drawn from working people themselves. He set up the Chartist Land Company as well as a Land and Labour Bank, and 70,000 working people from the slums of the industrial cities raised nearly £100,000. This visionary scheme was tragically defeated by a lack of capital, an over-optimistic business plan, attacks by a hostile press, attempts to discredit the concept by commissioners of the hated Poor Law, and refusal of Parliament to allow the company legal status.

William Thompson

William Thompson, an Irish economist, political writer, and supporter of female emancipation, was one of the first utopian socialists to believe in the ability of the working class to create its own future. Thompson did not share Robert Owen's faith that wealthy industrialists would provide capital for the new communities, and believed there was greater potential if working people themselves were to finance their own schemes. Thompson also believed in the necessity of the workers in any co-operative community having security of ownership of the community's land and capital property. In 1830 Thompson published *Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities, on the principles of Mutual Cooperation, United Possessions and Equality of Exertions and of the Means of Enjoyment,* in which he remarked:

If done without any aid from the rich and idle, how animating to the industrious classes! – to the rich, the selfish, what a humiliating reproach!

In the same work he defined community as follows:

An association of persons, in sufficient numbers, and living on a space of land of sufficient extent to supply by their own exertions all of each other's wants.

Community denotes common exertion and common benefit, common exertion according to the capabilities of each individual directed in the way most conducive to the common good, and common benefit according to the varying states and wants of each individual so as to produce as nearly as our best directed efforts can accomplish, equal happiness to all.

He hoped his instructions would make the establishment of co-operative communities as easy as for that of 'any ordinary manufacture'. He also believed that communities would provide markets for each other, and that commerce would flourish as a result, with consequences entirely beneficial to society:

The system of Co-operative Industry accomplishes this, not by the vain search after foreign markets throughout the globe, no sooner found than over-stocked and glutted by the restless competition of the starving producers, but by the voluntary union of the industrious or productive classes, in such numbers as to afford a market to each other*, by working together* for each other*, for the mutual supply, directly by themselves, of all their most indispensable wants, in the way of food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture.*

Trade union communities

Several early trade unions attempted to establish communities where working people could live in prosperity and dignity, emancipated from the industrial slums – drawing on their own financial resources rather than going cap in hand to the state or to wealthy philanthropists.

In 1844 William Evans, who ran a newsagent's shop in Shelton where he sold works by Wollstonecraft, Rousseau and Emerson, proposed to the newly formed Trades Union of Operative Potters that they throw their financial resources into a Joint Stock Emigration Company, to establish a model community in Illinois. He aimed to persuade 5,000

potters to buy a £1 share in the scheme, paying a shilling a week, producing a working capital of £5,000. By October 1844 all the potters' lodges had voted in favour of the scheme, and subscriptions were collected. Emigrants were to be chosen by ballot when subscriptions reached each successive £50 level. They would arrive to find a cabin built for them, five acres of land broken and sowed with wheat and corn, and fifteen acres awaiting cultivation.

This proved no hollow promise. The Union purchased land in Wisconsin and settled 134 individuals on 1,600 acres. Unfortunately, back in the Potteries, the unity of the pottery workers fell apart when a rival union was established. There was also discord in Wisconsin about equitable allocation of the land, which impeded the process of legalising the potters' possession of the land. The immigrants complained of the heat, the water, the Indians, and the sandy soil. In June 1850 a meeting of settlers in Fort Winnebago raised charges of misrepresentation, corruption and incompetence. By January 1851 the Emigration Society was abandoned, and the trade union movement in the Potteries was set back many years. Elsewhere in Sheffield around 1848 other trades unions took up the idea of land colonies. The Edge Tool Grinders acquired a farm of sixty-eight acres at Wincobank 'with a view to employing their surplus hands', and the File Hardeners acquired a similar farm elsewhere. The Brittannia Metal Smiths established an eleven-acre farm at Gleadless Common Side, employing a manager and a dozen men who supplied a shop which sold the produce at market prices. Employees were paid 14s a week with 6d for each dependent child.[35]

The Chartist Land Plan

Just off junction 17 on the M25 on the outskirts of London, a quiet country lane leads to the village of Heronsgate with its imposing houses, immaculate lawns, expensive cars. But here and there within the spacious gardens lie small cottages, and the narrow lanes, designed for carts rather than cars, are named not after poets or war heroes or local councillors, but commemorate rather a series of industrial towns: Halifax, Nottingham, Bradford, and Stockport. For this was once O'Connorville, a community designed and built by working people for themselves, a memorial to the aspirations of mid nineteenth-century Chartism.[36]

In 1838, and again in 1842, the Chartists had drawn up petitions calling for universal suffrage and annual elections, as a means of securing political power for all people rather than merely the privileged minority. They had travelled to town and village, collecting signatures. In Yorkshire when town meetings were banned they met by torchlight at night on the moors, and at last the petitions, bearing millions of signatures, were carried with ceremony to Parliament. Twice the petitions were presented, and twice they were dismissed.

Feargus O'Connor, leader of the radical wing of the Chartist movement, came up with a plan to settle large numbers of working people on the land, each man holding property with an annual rental value of at least forty shillings, sufficient to qualify for a county vote. The aim was simple: when enough working people had obtained property qualifications, the people would be able to vote themselves the reforms which those in power had denied them. O'Connor was editor of the *Northern Star* and in April and May 1843 his newspaper ran a series of letters (written by himself) addressed to the 'producers of wealth', and suggesting that 20,000 acres could support 5,000 families, with four acres per family, in forty estates, each with its community centre, school, library and hospital. Subsequently he published a booklet, 'A Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms.'[37]

Investment, he believed, would have to come from working people themselves. In 1845 O'Connor proposed that a company be formed and capital of £5,000 be raised from two thousand shares bought by working people for £2.10s each. This would allow 120 acres of good land to be brought at the current price of £18.15s an acre, providing sixty cultivators, selected by lot, with two acres each and £2,250 to buy cottages and stock. The allotments would be let by the company to the members in perpetuity at £5 a year (providing total rental income to the company of £300 a year). By selling twenty years of the rental income the company could raise a further £6,000, which would buy land for 72 families. Their rent would be capitalised in the same way and would buy land for 86 families, and so on.

O'Connor travelled to France and Belgium and met socialist and communist leaders, including Marx and Engels. They were vehemently opposed, regarding private land ownership as the basis of opposition to change in society. O'Connor was not discouraged, remaining firm in his belief that by owning a cottage and a piece of land, people would achieve fulfilment, independence and liberty.

Map of O'Connorville, 1847

O'Connor claimed that his plan would give everyone a chance to work for himself, would solve the problems of criminal law, dispense with many of the burdens of government and a standing army, and provide sanitary improvements and educational aid. In the *Northern Star* on 12th August 1848 he also claimed that the plan would reduce the suppression of wages of the industrial poor: 'With my operations I will thin the artificial labour market by employing thousands who are now destitute, and constituting an idle reserve to enable capitalists to live and make fortunes upon reductions of wages.' O'Connor insisted that he intended no socialism (on the Owenite model) nor partnership with the state. Ownership and control were always to reside with the individual, and O'Connor described himself as an 'elevator' not a 'leveller'.

The Land Plan office was set up at 83 Dean Street in Soho. The legal form of the new company was the first obstacle. Charitable registration was impossible because of the Plan's commercial aspects. The Registrar of Friendly Societies ruled that the company was not a type of savings scheme and was therefore ineligible. The remaining options were to establish a joint stock company (which required prescribed forms of governance and account keeping), or by Act of Parliament apply for a royal charter, available for non-profit-making benevolent activities or for single purposes such as building a railway. All were expensive (the cost of a private Act of Parliament if uncontested was about £2,500) and none were entirely suitable. Initially O'Connor opted for the joint stock route, and approached the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, achieving provisional registration as a joint stock company. The company was originally called the Chartist Land Company, then the Chartist Co-operative Land Company, and finally the National Land Company.

Working people asked why they could not save to buy the freehold on their allotment. So in August 1846 O'Connor proposed to found a Land Bank where members could deposit money at 4% interest, and save towards the £250 purchase cost of their allotment. Deposits would progressively reduce an allottee's rent. A levy of 3d per share per annum was made to cover expenses of the bank, arrangements of the company, and directors wages, and in January 1847 the Land and Labour Bank went into operation.

The Land Plan was widely promoted and Chartist branches across the country collected 3d or 6d a head towards shares. By April 1846, 1,487 people had

paid in full, enough to establish the first settlement, so O'Connor and his colleagues started to travel in search of land. In September 1846 he visited Devon but was not impressed, calling it the 'land of Parsons, sour cider, and low wages.' He settled on a piece of farmland outside Rickmansworth, and named it O'Connorville.

The model cottages at O'Connorville had three rooms: a sitting room, kitchen, bedroom, and next to them outhouses for a cow, pony, cart, wash-house, dairy, wood, fowls, and pigsties. The company provided equipment, farm stock, manure, and fruit trees. O'Connor was determined that quality should be high and the cottages were roomy, well lit, with oak plank floors and good cast iron grates. As the town was being built, working people holding shares would turn up from all over England, finger the seasoned oak, and exclaim 'Eh! But that's rare stuff!'

A ballot was held to select the first thirty five settlers, and they arrived on 1st May 1847. It was, according to O'Connor, 'England's "May Day"', and a band struck up the tune 'See the conquering heroes come'. At the official opening on 17th August 1847 O'Connor stood on a platform jubilantly waving a giant cabbage.

In 1847 O'Connor stood for election to Parliament in a Nottingham by-election. In a campaign speech O'Connor described the case of Charlie Tawes, an allottee who had come from Radford to O'Connorville. Charlie had been shut up in a 'Whig bastille' (a workhouse), separated from his wife and children.

Now he had been reunited with them and raised to independence. Now he had four pigs in his sty (tremendous cheering). Would he have ever got them by sticking in Radford workhouse? If the government would put half the money spent on building workhouses into buying land for poor men, it would destroy the new Poor Law system.

O'Connor won a surprise victory. Across the country working people rejoiced. In Barnsley candles were lit in every working class window and the Chartist flag of green and pink hung over the streets.

Over the next two years, working people continued to buy shares and money poured in. By the end of 1847 O'Connor was able to claim that over 60,000 members were holding 180,000 shares, and £90,000 of capital had been accumulated. Further settlements were built at Lowbands, Minster Lovell, Snigs End, and Great Dodford. Education was always a core objective: 'The mind has

Chartist cottage at Great Dodford

not been forgotten, as each house is fitted up with a neat and elegant library.' Schools were built and schoolmasters appointed, employed by the Land Company. The allottees represented a cross-section of the mid-nineteenth century working classes. Former occupations included:

Coalminer, weaver, labourer, calico printer, shoemaker, limeburner, block printer, stockinger, baker, woolcomber, innkeeper, smith, tailor, stonecutter, cabinetmaker, joiner, potter, cordwainer, mason, grocer, piecer, moulder, nailer, victualler, postman, skinner, butcher, embroiderer, farmer, hatter, spinner, milkman, servant, gardener, lacemaker, overlooker, warehousemen, tinman, clerk, thatcher, plumber, painter, plasterer, mechanic, clothier, fustian cutter, grinder, bricklayer, trunkmaker, seamstress, warper, turner, carpenter, slater, schoolmistress, cotton band maker.

Life in the new settlements was difficult: the urban settlers were unskilled in rural trades, and often arrived malnourished and in poor health. Nevertheless, initial enthusiasm was high and by 1848 some of the allotments were, literally, bearing fruit. One claimed to have 700 fruit-bearing trees: apples, pears, gooseberries and currants.

Attempts were made to find customers for produce. At Great Dodford the settlers cultivated strawberries and made jam for sale in markets in Bromsgrove and Birmingham. At Lowbands and Snigs End market gardens were developed to supply Gloucester. At O'Connorville some residents became cobblers and carpenters, providing services to the agricultural community. Outbuildings were sometimes converted into small workshops, and at Great Dodford wives and daughters started making bonnets. Some allottees demonstrated a sound business sense, co-operating to buy coal and groceries at wholesale prices.
But O'Connor was falling under personal strain. Like many a modern community activist he found himself doing too much of everything, describing himself as 'bailiff, contractor, architect, engineer, surveyor, farmer, dungmaker, cow and pig jobber, milkman, horse jobber and Member of Parliament.' He started drinking heavily.

The uncertainty of the company's legal status was a great burden. In an attempt to meet the regulations for the deed of registration, the company directors were advised (wrongly it seems) that they needed to collect 40,000 signatures. The company's representatives travelled from town to town in a weary and expensive attempt to achieve this. National and regional newspapers began to attack the company's business methods, pointing out with sanctimonious glee that while incorporation remained unresolved, the legal rights of working people in the settlements were uncertain. This created a crisis of confidence. Receipts dropped quickly towards the end of 1847 and some of the lucky winners in the ballots promptly sold their allotments, for amounts between £70 and £120. O'Connor found it hard to hold his tongue and addressed the editor of one national paper as 'You unmitigated ass! You sainted fowl! You canonised ape!'

In February 1848 O'Connor, desperate to achieve legal status, presented a petition to Parliament to legalise the company through Act of Parliament, and the Bill received a first reading. It was not immediately rejected, probably because the government did not want to be held responsible for dashing the hopes of so many working people. A date for a second reading was appointed and a Parliamentary investigation began. Complaints started to surface from within the company. Meetings of Directors and dissident representatives were called, to which O'Connor was not invited, and he used the columns of the Northern Star to vent his frustration and anger.

The enquiry took evidence from a Poor Law specialist, who pointed out that tenants would be eligible for poor relief by virtue of length of residence and level of rent they paid, and this meant that if the allotments failed and the tenants threw themselves on the parish for relief, rural parishes would be forced to levy a massive increase in poor rates and this would suddenly reduce to nothing the value of every property in the parish. His conclusion was that the settlements were not sustainable, and therefore that they were likely to lead to 'serious and sudden burthens upon the poor's rates of those parishes in which they acquire land.' He noted that the allottees were not yet paying rent, that manure provided in the first year had been used up and not replaced, that some of the settlers had already fled the land.

O'Connor replied that the settlements were viable, and that he had provided 'a market, better than the gin-palace or the beer-shop, for those who had small savings to carry to the labour field.' One of the committee members travelled to Snigs End and Lowbands to see for himself. He was surprised at the high standard of building and cultivation on Lowbands. Wheat and potatoes, he reported, were as good as those of any farmers.

There were accusations of financial mismanagement, even suggestions that O'Connor had been lining his own pockets by tricking the poor. Clutching bundles of paper, O'Connor pulled out records and accounts. A government accountant claimed they were unintelligible, so O'Conner took him to Great Dodford and showed him more piles of papers. Patiently the accountant examined them all. His conclusion was a vindication of O'Connor: 'I am thoroughly satisfied, not only that the whole of the money has been honourably appropriated and is fully accounted for, but also that several thousand pounds more of Mr O'Connor's own funds have been applied in furtherance of the views of the National Land Company.'

So far O'Connor was standing his ground, but there was worse to come.
A government barrister, Edward Lawes, asserted that the company was established for the purpose of an illegal lottery, where many paid but only a few would gain. Subscriptions from 70,000 (of whom about half had fully paid up) had been necessary to locate 250 people in the new villages. A single subscription could never suffice because the cost per location was between £200 and £300. Total subscriptions amounted to £91,000. £35,000 had been spent on buying land,

£50,000 on forming and building estates, £4,000 on expenses of management. Cash assets were £7,000 but there were debts to the Land bank of £6,800 and at least £3,000 was owing to O'Connor. So there was no money to build more estates, unless the reproductive principle, whereby rental income would be capitalised to raise the investment for the next estate, and so on, could be proved viable.

Lawes claimed it could not. As the number of subscribers was 70,000, and the cost per allotment £300, the sum needed was £21m. Fully paid up shares from the 70,000 subscribers would bring in capital of £273,000. The government accountants showed that by mortgaging and re-mortgaging, the original capital could grow to a total of £819,000. This would locate 2,730 people, but leave 67,270 members unprovided for. Moreover, the scheme would take longer to realise its benefits than the lives of its members: even if all the capital were mortgaged and each new estate were bought and built within a year, the company would take 75 years to house its members. On 30th July the Committee delivered its verdict to the House of Commons. The company in its present form was illegal, and accounts were imperfectly kept. The large number of people involved, all of whom had acted in good faith, should be allowed to wind up the undertaking and relieve themselves of the penalties to which they had subjected themselves. Finally, careful to give the appearance that the government was critical only of the methods, and not of the social objectives of the company, the Committee stated that 'it should be left entirely open to the parties concerned to propose to Parliament any new measure for carrying out the expectations and objects of the promoters of the company.'

This was a crushing defeat. In the Northern Star O'Connor attempted to present the verdict in the best possible light. He implied that contributions from the poor alone were inadequate to capitalise such projects, pointing out (with justice) that subsidy on a large scale was provided by the government of the day for other projects in the national interest, such as railway and mining schemes. However, the spirit of common enterprise eroded rapidly, and now everyone looked only to their own interests. The tenants were determined to acquire a title deed and not to pay rent, the unallotted members wanted no-one to get a penny before the final dividend and demanded that back rent be paid, the directors and staff wanted to extricate themselves and leave O'Connor to carry the full

responsibility for failure, and O'Connor wanted payment of his own expenses.

Relations between O'Connor and the allottees became tense. Some who refused to pay rent were letting their houses and land to others and drawing good rent for them, so O'Connor threatened to sell the estates, and dissident groups emerged among the tenants. Despite everything, during 1849 the Company pursued attempts to register the company under the Joint Stock Companies Act. Building continued at Great Dodford, and sowing and planting at the other estates.

But O'Connor was under attack from all sides and even within the Chartist movement he was isolated. In April 1848 the last great Chartist petition had been presented to Parliament, in a wagon drawn by four horses from O'Connor's estate at Snigs End, trimmed with red, green and white streamers. But when the petition had been examined it was found to contain far fewer signatures than claimed. O'Connor had become frantic and abusive and fled the chamber. Many of the national Chartist leaders attacked O'Connor, claiming he was ruining their cause by his extreme views and erratic behaviour. Others in the co-operative movement complained that the Land Plan had diverted the energies and resources of working people away from their efforts.[38]

O'Connor was now suffering badly. His red hair began to turn white and he was said to be drinking heavily. He was losing control and in August 1849 he wrote a bizarre letter to Queen Victoria beginning 'Well Beloved Cousin', and signing himself as 'Your Majesty's Cousin, Feargus, Rex, by the Grace of the People.' For a while O'Connor rallied; he went on a speaking tour of the Scottish branches and was received with acclaim. Support also came from the pioneer sociologist Harriet Martineau, who wrote two open letters on the capabilities of two and a quarter acres of land to support her household of five, with the labour of one man from the workhouse. But nothing now could save the scheme. In June 1850 the courts rejected the attempts to register the company. In July a petition was made to wind up the company, and in 1851 it was finally closed down.

In 1852 O'Connor assaulted a policeman after a row at the Lyceum Theatre and spent seven days in prison. News began to circulate that he was neglected and in need, and working people responded quickly and generously: a fund was

started in March, and allottees and members from across the country subscribed what they could.

But in June O'Connor was taken to a clinic for the insane at Chiswick. He considered himself a state prisoner, and regarded his confinement with 'grave pride.' In 1854 the first signs of epilepsy appeared, and in 1855 his sister removed him from the clinic to her home. On 30th August he died and on 10th September large crowds followed the coffin to Kensal Green cemetery. The epitaph reads:

Reader, pause,
thou treadest on
the grave of a patriot.
While philanthropy
is a virtue, and
patriotism not a crime,
will the name of
O'CONNOR
be admired and this
monument respected.

By 1858 at O'Connorville, soon to be renamed Heronsgate, only three of the original settlers were left. Because the estate was close to London, the houses were bought up by well-off people who enjoyed the privacy given by the large grounds about the house. Not much is left in Heronsgate of its radical past, although the local pub bears the name 'The Land of Liberty, Peace and Plenty.' After a while some of the original Chartist cottages in the other settlements were also replaced with larger houses, although quite a few have survived and one at Great Dodford is maintained by the National Trust in its original condition. Soon the memories of the original settlers had passed into local folklore, and for years afterwards the story was told of the man, arriving at Charterville (Minster Lovell) from the northern slums, who, it was said, had never seen a pig before and chastised it for noisiness.

O'Connor has not been treated kindly by historians. For some the fact that he was an outspoken Irishman was sufficient to condemn him as a demagogue. Early accounts of Chartism were written by more moderate Chartists, who feared that O'Connor's radicalism jeopardised public acceptance of their cause. They criticised his community experiments, believing that they were a distraction from the primary goal of universal suffrage, which they considered to be the only path to justice and prosperity. Today, in the knowledge that the right to vote has not, on its own, produced these universal benefits, O'Connor's vision has more resonance than ever.

Model villages and garden cities

The work of Robert Owen and O'Connor had an impact on efforts by industrial philanthropists such as Titus Salt, George Cadbury, Joseph Rowntree and William Hesketh Lever, who built model villages for their factory workers. Lever's attempt to establish 'Port Fishlight' in the Shetlands led to an offer to transfer land ownership to the islanders themselves, but the offer was turned down. Ebenezer Howard created the Garden City movement, in Letchworth, Welwyn and elsewhere. One of Howard's core principles was that land would be community-owned, and income from the land would fund community amenities.

The industrial philanthropists

The work of Robert Owen and O'Connor had an impact on efforts by industrial philanthropists to build model communities for working people: examples included Titus Salt at Saltaire near Bradford, George Cadbury at Bourneville near Birmingham and Joseph Rowntree at New Earswick outside York. William Hesketh Lever's model town at Port Sunlight in the Wirral was the inspiration for a West End musical, which claimed the distinction of first bringing the tango to England.

In many ways these were remarkable achievements. The impact on the quality of life of residents was profound: the annual infant mortality rate at Bourneville and Port Sunlight was half that prevailing in Birmingham and Liverpool. Housing was good quality, with piped supplies of fresh water and gas at Saltaire (unheard of in the slums of Bradford) and leading architects and designers were employed at New Earswick. Environmental considerations were given a high priority: at Saltaire a spacious park was designed and the course of the river Aire was altered to improve the view; at Bourneville and New Earswick one tenth of the land was reserved for gardens and green space. The value of garden produce at Bourneville was estimated as equivalent to a saving of two shillings a week on the rents for householders, and Cadbury declared that 'no man ought to be compelled to live where a rose cannot grow'. Public baths, washhouses, schools, hospitals, and libraries were provided, and at Port Sunlight even an art gallery.

Both Cadbury and Rowntree encouraged residents to elect a village council, and to manage various local amenities, notably community centres. Community ownership however was denied, and control remained in the hands of the industrialists through the family-run charitable trusts which they created. As a consequence they were able to impose their own beliefs, values - and idiosyncrasies.

The sale of alcohol was forbidden in most model communities, and smoking, gambling and swearing were not allowed in public in Saltaire. Titus Salt forbade people to hang out their washing. At the factory at Bourneville corridors were arranged to keep boys and girls separate on their way to or from work, and they had separate recreation areas on either side of the main road. Also at Bourneville cottages provided for female employees were protected by night watchmen, one of whose duties was to light fires in the afternoon so that the girls came home to a warm home in the evening. But Cadbury refused to employ married women, believing that a wife's place was in the home.

Rowntree hoped that New Earswick would become a self-governing community. He wrote in a private memorandum: 'I do not want to establish communities bearing the stamp of charity but rather of rightly ordered and self-governing communities – self-governing, that is, within the broad limits laid down by the Trust.'[39] Despite this declaration, Rowntree and his descendents were unwilling to let go of ownership or decision making, and New Earswick, as with other model communities, never passed into community control.

Community asset ownership rejected

There was, almost, one exception. William Hesketh Lever's second community experiment after Port Sunlight became known as Port Fishlight, and ended in an offer of transfer of land to community ownership.

Lever visited the remote Western Isles in 1884 and when the island of Lewis came on the market in 1917 he bought it. Two years later he also purchased the adjoining island of Harris and embarked upon a bold plan to transform the economy of the islands by modernising the fishing industry. There would be an ice-making factory at Stornoway, refrigerated cargo ships to take fish to

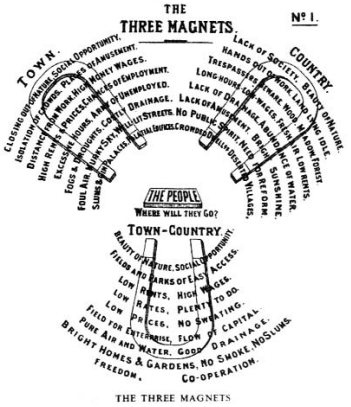
a depot at Fleetwood, herring-curing facilities, a canning factory, and a plant installed to make fish-cakes, fish-paste, glue, animal feed and fertiliser. To create a market for the islanders' fish, he bought up no less than 350 fishmongers' shops throughout Britain, creating the Macfisheries chain.

But in 1919 demobilised servicemen, who had been promised 'smallholdings fit for heroes' after the war, started a land invasion by occupying plots of farmland and erecting shelters for themselves and their families. Lever condemned the squatters and ordered them off his land. This created local animosity as indeed did Lever's high-handed attitude towards the crofting way of life, which he regarded as an archaic impediment to progress. The Scottish Office took the side of the squatters, and these disputes, alongside financial problems faced by Lever Brothers, meant that works slowed down and the grand plan was never fully realised.

In September 1923 Lever announced that he intended to leave the island. At the same time he offered to gift all the crofters the freehold of their land, and to hand over the rest of the island to district trusts. This was exactly what some of the islanders had been campaigning for. But by now mistrust ran very deep, and the Highland Land League representing the crofters and all the district councils (with the exception of Stornoway) turned down the offer, and so the islands were sold, once again, to absentee landlords.

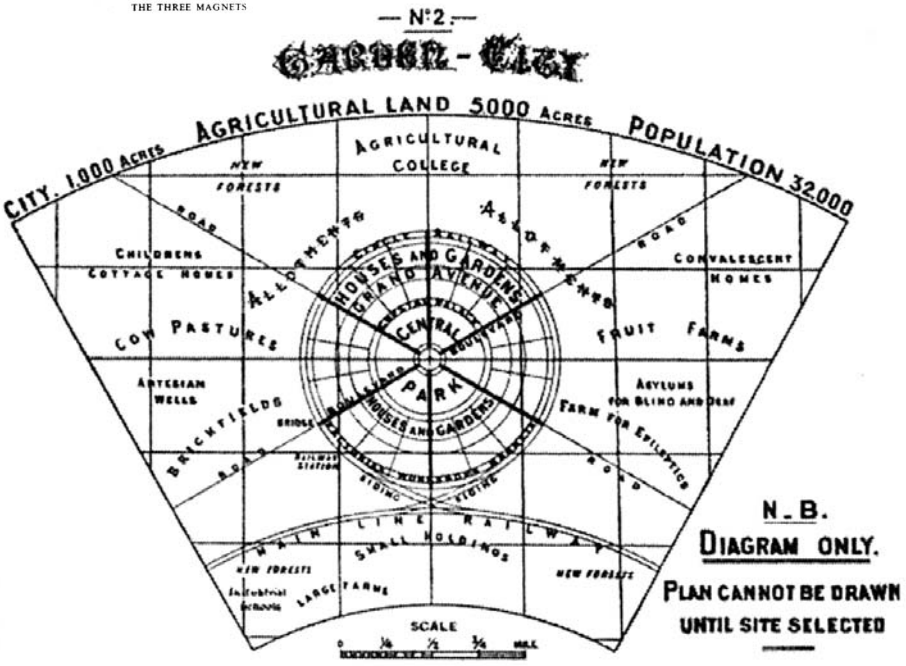
Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City

In 1898 Ebenezer Howard, an obscure court stenographer, published *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Plan to Real Reform*. This book set out a vision of a garden city of 30,000 people on a 6,000 acre estate, intended to combine the very best of town and country life. Howard was consciously attempting to put into practice, on a large scale, ideas he found in Herbert Spencer's land scheme[40] (itself deriving in part from Thomas Spence's land plan), the model city of James Silk Buckingham,[41] Edward Bellamy's utopian vision of state communism,[42] and Henry George's land value taxation theories. The Garden City Association was formed in 1899, and its members visited and admired experiments at Port Sunlight and Bourneville. In September 1903 the 'First Garden City Ltd' was incorporated and construction began at Letchworth, on 3,800 acres costing £160,000.



THE THREE MAGNETS

Diagrams from Ebenezer Howard,
Garden Cities of To-morrow, *1902*



GARDEN CITY AND RURAL BELT

Letchworth attracted a stream of people keen to discover new ways of living: Tolstoyans, anarchists, vegetarians, trade unionists, socialists, followers of Ruskin - even Lenin, who found refuge there for a short time in 1907. George Orwell was to say that in the garden city you could find 'every fruit juice drinker, sandal wearer, sex maniac, Quaker, nature cure quack, pacifist and feminist in England.'[43] Schools were established on advanced principles: the school diet was based on butter, milk, eggs, fresh fruit, and vegetables, and morning assemblies were deliberative rather than devotional.

Howard's approach was distinguished by its treatment of land values and tenure arrangements. Land for the settlement would be purchased by a Trust at agricultural land values (then about £40 per acre), with a rate of return for investors of not more than 4%. All occupants would pay a rent (referred to as the rent-rate as there was to be no separate general rate levied by the local authority) and the income received in this way would be used for three purposes: to pay interest on the initial capital sum; to pay back the capital; to pay for the general running costs, and welfare of the garden city. Over a period of time the first two items of expenditure would fall away, and the Trust would be left with a greater choice of what it could do to improve amenities for the community. This was a radically different model from that which applied elsewhere, where rising land values were enjoyed primarily as a source of profit for private landlords. The secret, claimed Howard, was to retain the land in common ownership and to build this into the plan from the outset.

The influence of Letchworth spread rapidly. Joseph Rowntree appointed Raymond Unwin, the gifted architect of Letchworth, to design New Earswick outside York. Hampstead Garden Suburb was begun in 1907. Plans were drawn up for garden cities across the country: at Fallings Park near Wolverhampton, Warrington, Hull, Newport, and Bristol. One was Woodlands, a community planned for the employees of the Brodsworth Colliery near Doncaster.

In 1920, Howard, together with a group of followers (including several Quakers) established the New Town Trust and then the Welwyn Garden City Limited, with a capital of a quarter of a million pounds. An agricultural guild was set up to supply the inhabitants of Welwyn with milk and vegetables, using land leased from the Garden City Company. The business was kept separate from the Trust, and without ownership of the land it had nothing to

fall back on in time of financial difficulty. As a result it failed during the agricultural depression in the 1920s, and the land was re-let to tenant farmers.

A town planning profession began to emerge. The Garden Cities Association grew into the Town and Country Planning Association. The first Town Planning Act came into force in 1909 to regulate development, and in the same year a department of civic design was established at the Liverpool School of Architecture, funded by William Hesketh Lever (the founder of Port Sunlight). In the 1930s industrialists and their friends in government came to realise that garden cities provided for employers the housing and other amenities which their Victorian predecessors such as Titus Salt had to provide themselves. In Manchester the local authority purchased land and built Wythenshawe, on principles much diluted from those of Howard; there was for example no town centre. With large scale government investment, trading estates were established at Treforest in Glamorgan, Team Valley at Durham and Tyneside, and Hillington near Glasgow. These were often functional and uninspired places, and had little in common with Howard's original vision.

Communities against the state

William Morris found in medieval guilds and socialism the inspiration for a way to alleviate the soulnessness of modern industrial society, and aimed to establish small semi-agricultural communities, writing *A Dream of John Ball* in 1888 and *News from Nowhere* in 1891. The belief that state government was inherently soul-destroying and that people could only find personal fulfilment in small self-governing communities close to nature found its fullest expression in colonies established by English followers of Kropotkin and Tolstoy, including eminent philosophers, social scientists, vegetarians and sandal makers.

William Morris

In *News from Nowhere* published in 1890 William Morris imagined a future where all land and all facilities would be held in common and used for the benefit of all people. National government would be abolished (and Morris imagines that in his future utopia the Houses of Parliament would be given a more productive function: a storage place for manure). Government would be undertaken at local level within a commune, ward or parish, and power would be exercised not through elected representatives, but directly by the people.

Decisions would be made by majority vote, but votes would only be taken after the matter was first adjourned for discussion and debate. If the vote when it took place was a close one, there would be a further adjournment allowing for more discussion, for decisions would only be made if there was a strong majority in favour.[44]

This would be a garden utopia, where people would take meals together, and everyone would be engaged in useful and creative work, 'where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty,' in sharp contrast to the blighted villages and cities of the heavily industrialised England of his time. Morris was no mere fantasist – he recognised that the transition to such a society would be long and difficult, and that a period of class struggle and counter revolution would be inevitable.

Morris hated the uniformity which he believed would be produced by Fabian

state socialism, and warned of 'the danger of the community falling into bureaucracy, the multiplicity of boards and offices, and all the paraphernalia of official authority, which is, after all a burden, even when it is exercised by the delegation of the whole people and in accordance with their wishes.'[45] He believed that small self-determining communes would allow people to deal with problems 'in conscious association with each other' and that the variety this would produce was very much to be welcomed:

It will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other... Variety of life is as much an aim of true Communism as equality of condition, and... nothing but a union of these two will bring about real freedom.[46]

The size of community was a critical factor. Too large and they would become impersonal, but too small and they would also fail, as the socialist Edward Carpenter explained:

To have a score or fifty, even a hundred people penned together in a little community, they are bound either to chafe and gall each other into a state of exasperation and explosion, or else if they are so likeminded as to have no serious differences it can only be by reason of their exceeding narrowness and sectarian character.[47]

Morris is sometimes dismissed as someone who yearned to recreate a romanticised, idealised past which never existed, but that is to trivialise the nature of his vision. As E P Thompson points out, William Morris was 'the first creative artist of major stature in the world, to take his stand, consciously and without shadow of compromise, with the revolutionary working class.'[48] Many of Morris' ideas would have resonated with liberal social reformers, industrial philanthropists, Marxist socialists, communitarian anarchists, and the pioneers of garden cities. Morris possessed the creative genius to imagine a synthesis of all of this.

Kropotkin and the first anarchist communities

Prince Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, visited England in 1876, again in 1881-2, and then from 1886 he lived

much of the time in London and in Brighton. True society, Kropotkin asserted, would be restored by establishing free village communities. In response to Social Darwinism and T H Huxley's *Struggle for Existence* (1888) with its insistence on the survival of the fittest, Kropotkin published a series of articles, including 'The Coming Reign of Plenty' and 'The Industrial Village of the Future', showing how the guilds and free communes of medieval Europe afforded examples of non-political institutions freely co-operating.[49] In 1892 he reprinted these articles in book form as *Conquete du Pain* (translated in 1906 as The *Conquest of Bread*). Here and elsewhere he argued for 'a society without a state', a federation of free communes.

An anarchist colony at Norton Hall near Shefffield was set up by followers of the socialist Edward Carpenter, much influenced by Kropotkin's ideas. The colonists were teetotal, vegetarian, non-smoking, grew lettuce and manufactured sandals. A further attempt to test the theories propounded by Kropotkin took place at Clousden Hill near Newcastle. Here in 1895 four men, two with small families, took a farm consisting of 20 acres of poor land. They pooled their money into a common fund, there were no wages, and each received pocket money according to how the fund stood. Eating was communal. They sold produce to the Sunderland and Newcastle Co-operatives and traded with the Newcastle Green market. The settlement was visited by the trade unionist Tom Mann, Kropotkin himself, and others, and kept going until the turn of the century.

Count Leo Tolstoy

Count Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and philosopher, rejected the modern state and all efforts to organise the external condition of people's lives, which he believed were a divergence from the inner needs of mankind. He called for an organic society based on self-government and co-operation of free men working in federated groups: small communities with as close a connection to nature as possible, based on a form of Christianity purged of dogmas and mysticism, 'not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth.'[50]

In 1894 his followers established the Brotherhood Trust and set up a grocery and vegetable co-operative in Downham Rd, Kingsland, in North London – all the profits including the customer dividend were to be used to purchase land to

establish communities. In 1897 a community was established at Purleigh on a twenty-three-acre estate, with fruit trees and a kitchen garden, and a printing press. It foundered over debates about whether or not to admit homeless vagrants, and internal dissension was compounded by the mental instability of some of its leaders. Other communities were formed in Essex, Leeds, and Blackburn, and also at Leicester where in Braunstone in 1899 five vegetarians acquired half an acre of land and formed a land society to acquire more.

Another Tolstoyan colony at Stroud, near Whiteway, quarrelled over the question of land ownership. One member wanted the land to be reconveyed to the 'Real and Eternal Owner', but as this did not meet the requirements of the law they registered under the names of three members, then ceremoniously burnt the land deeds: 'we had a very merry time burning the deeds,' they reported.

Land value taxation

Henry George in his book *Progress and Poverty* in 1879 explained how the expropriation of land and other common assets by the few was creating poverty for the many. His solution was a single tax, on increases in land value. The Liberal politician Joseph Chamberlain was an advocate for these measures, and Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Winston Churchill, tried to introduce a land tax based on Henry George's ideas in his budget of 1909. The House of Lords, scandalised by this assault on hereditary property rights, blocked the budget, and provoked a constitutional crisis. A further attempt was made in 1913 but was abandoned on the outbreak of the First World War in the interests of national unity. Ramsey MacDonald introduced the 1931 Land Valuation Act, but his Labour government fell and the Act was repealed within four months. In 1975 Labour introduced a Community Land Act giving local authorities power to borrow money for compulsory purchase of land at a price which discounted development gain, but a financial crisis prevented application of the Act and the legislation was later repealed by the Conservatives.

Henry George

Born in Philadelphia, Henry George went to sea before the mast at the age of 15, was an unsuccessful gold miner in California, and then worked his way up through the newspaper industry, starting as a printer and ending up editor and owner.

On a visit to New York, George was struck by the paradox that the poor in that city were much worse off than the poor in less developed California. This insight led to his 1879 book Progress and Poverty, which was a huge success, selling over two million copies.

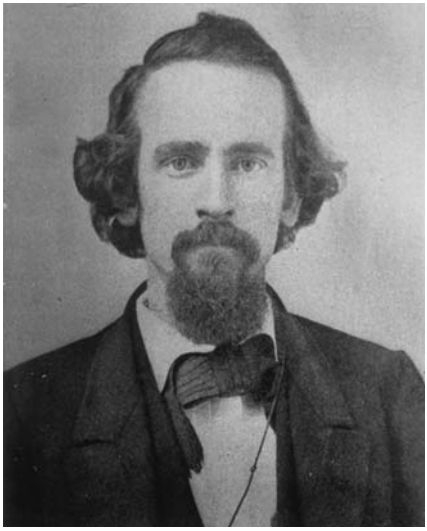
This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social, and political difficulties that perplex the world, and with which statesmanship and philanthropy and

education grapple in vain. From it come the clouds that overhang the future of the most progressive and self-reliant nations. It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization and which not to answer is to be destroyed. So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. The reaction must come. The tower leans from its foundations, and every new story but hastens the final catastrophe. To educate men who must be condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal, is to stand a pyramid on its apex.[51]

George attempted to give an economic explanation for the growth of poverty in an age of massively increased industrial productivity. He argued that much of the wealth created by social and technological advances is captured by land owners and others who monopolise natural resources. The only remedy therefore was to bring about a fundamental change in the system of land ownership.

Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labor, is monopolized. To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership. Nothing else will go to the cause of the evil - in nothing else is there the slightest hope.[52]

The question was how to achieve this? George considered the ideas of Herbert Spencer, who in *Social Statics* had proposed that land should be held in common, and leased in lots to the highest bidders (much as Thomas Spence had suggested a century before). But George was quick to recognise that such a solution would present a 'shock to present customs and habits of thought' and an 'extension of government machinery - which is to be avoided.' George came up with an alternative. Believing that it was unjust that those who had appropriated natural resources were allowed to profit from them, while productive activity on the other hand was burdened by taxation, George's solution was both radical and simple. Landowners would be allowed to retain their land ownership, but all taxation should be replaced by a single tax on land value.



Henry George

I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them continue to call it their land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernel. It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.[53]

Not only, according to George, would a land value tax be the means to achieve a fairer distribution of wealth, but it would also encourage and increase productivity, for both capitalists and labouring classes would receive their full reward. Productivity and justice could exist in harmony, and poverty would be ended.

Well may the community leave to the individual producer all that prompts him to exertion; well may it let the laborer have the full reward of his labor, and the capitalist the full return of his capital. For the more that labor and capital produce, the greater grows the common wealth in which all may share. And in the value or rent of land is this general gain expressed in a definite and concrete form. Here is a fund which the state may take while leaving to labor and capital their full reward. With increased activity of production this would commensurately increase.

Government would change its character, and would become the administration of a great co-operative society. It would become merely the agency by which the common property was administered for the common benefit.[54]

In 1886 George ran for mayor of New York, and polled second (ahead of Theodore Roosevelt). He ran again in 1897, but died four days before the

election. An estimated 100,000 people attended his funeral. George's ideas were partially adopted in South Africa, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Australia, where state governments still levy a land value tax, but at a low level and with many exemptions. A follower of George, Lizzie Maggie, created 'The Landlord's Game' in 1904 to popularise his theories. This led to the modern board game, Monopoly.

Joseph Chamberlain and Lloyd George

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Land Nationalisation Society called for total abolition of private land ownership. In the 'People's Land Charter' it called for the state to become owner of all land and the minerals it contained; local authorities would ensure that the land was put to the use that would best serve the community as a whole.

However, these ideas were never translated into a political programme, and instead it was the taxation approach of Hernry George that seemed most likely to succeed. The Liberal Party wrote principles of land value taxation into its constitution, and Winston Churchill was among those who espoused the cause. In his 'Radical Programme' in 1885 the prominent Liberal politician Joseph Chamberlain also urged a tax on land values. In the 1880s the Liberal government passed legislation to enable Irish tenants to buy their own land. The legislation did not apply to other parts of the United Kingdom, but it was still a controversial move, and many Whig landowners broke away and joined the Conservatives.

The 1909 'People's budget' of Lloyd George imposed a modest tax (1d in the pound) on the capital value of all undeveloped urban and suburban land. He also proposed a new tax of 20% of the unearned increment on land values, that is, the increase in value that arose from a public decision or public spending such as the building of a new road next to an estate, rather than the landlord's own actions. 'Who made 10,000 people owners of the soil and the rest of us trespassers in the land of our birth?' asked Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a speech in Newcastle. Winston Churchill declared 'No more fair, consistent, or salutary proposals for taxation have ever been made in the House of Commons.'

The House of Lords disagreed and wrecked the budget bill, provoking a constitutional crisis. The King supported the Lords, and there was no alternative but to call a general election, but at

the election the Liberals lost their working majority. The government's further attempts in 1913 to introduce land taxation and related measures were derailed by the First World War, when divisive issues such as this were thrust into the background in the interests of national unity.

The 1931 Land Valuation Act and the 1975 Community Land Act

A further attempt to embody these principles in law took place in 1931 when the Labour government of the day introduced legislation similar to that attempted by Lloyd George. The 1931 Land Valuation Act provided for the valuation of all land with provision for the revision of the valuation rolls every seven years, and a tax of 1d in the pound on the value of every acre of land. But two months later the Labour government was brought down and within four months the 'National Government' which took office repealed the Act.

The Community Land Act of 1975, along with the Development Land Tax Act of 1976, was a further effort to empower communities to capture socially created land value.[55] Local authorities were given the power to acquire land for public ownership, by agreement or by compulsory purchase. The Secretary of State was empowered to dispense with a public enquiry as a preliminary to a compulsory purchase order. Local authorities, having acquired land, had the responsibility of seeing that it was developed, either by themselves or by others. The price to be paid was the market price, less any Development Land Tax payable by the owner. The tax was 80 per cent of development gains realised by the owner, and it was intended that the rate should eventually be raised to 100 per cent.

The price would exclude any 'hope value' of the land being later developed for other purposes. The cost of buying land, including costs of administration and interest payments etc., would be financed initially by borrowing, and would be repaid from the proceeds of disposals. Land for commercial and industrial development was to be made available on ground leases of normally not more than 99 years. Land for residential purposes was to be disposed of either as freehold, or by way of a building licence granted to the builder whereby eventually the freehold would be conveyed to the house owner.

The proposals stimulated considerable debate. The Conservatives vowed to repeal the Community Land Act although they accepted the idea of a Development

Land Tax (indeed they had originally proposed it) provided that the tax level was set at a lower rate. The government's spending cuts of December 1976 reduced the borrowing capacity of local authorities by £70m and this meant that there were no funds available for acquisition of land. When the Conservatives came to power in 1979 they repealed the Community Land Act and reduced the Development Land Tax to 60 per cent. The Development Land Tax was eventually repealed in the Finance Act 1985.[56]

Time to try again?

In the 1970s professional bodies opposed the Acts. The President of the Incorporated Society of Valuers and Auctioneers said: 'Any suggestion that the Act should be retained and amended because the threat of repeal causes a greater level of uncertainty, should be opposed. A bad Act is a bad Act. A house of cards is no sounder because it has mosaic tiles on it.'[57] However, this view has been challenged in recent times. In 2004 Wyndham Thomas CBE, Vice-President of the Town & Country Planning Association, pointed out that:

... since 1947 we have tried three times, and failed, to bring in a system for taxing increases in the value of land allocated for development by the local planning authorities. The three attempts were the 1947 Planning Act's development charge, the 1967 Land Commission Act's betterment levy, and the Development Land Tax Act of 1976, which complemented the 1975 Community Land Act. Each attempt failed, it is said, not because the concept is wrong, but simply because no practicable system for collecting betterment (the most useful shorthand term) can be devised. My contention is that none of the three systems was tried for long enough, and subjected to that continuing review, modification and improvement that applies, as it must, to every major taxation measure now in use. It is time we tried again.[58]

Three acres and a cow

At the end of the nineteenth century, in response to rural depopulation and the plight of the urban working classes, Joseph Chamberlain took up 'the Right to Dig' as his campaign slogan, claiming that with three acres and a cow, working people could become self-sufficient. An Act was passed in 1908 and as many as 30,000 families were settled on the land as a result. George Lansbury and the Board of Guardians at the Poplar workhouse founded farm colonies in Essex in the early 1900s. During the First World War, there were renewed calls to provide allotments for ex-servicemen, and in the 1930s the Land Settlement Association was founded by a combination of Quaker groups and the National Council of Social Service (later to become the National Council of Voluntary Organisations), to provide working communities on the land for the unemployed. Government investment was provided and many local councils transferred assets for this purpose. In the years leading up to and during the Second World War there were many small agricultural communities established by poets and pacifists – few survived for long.

The Right to Dig

In 1881 a Royal Commission revealed that 700,000 members of farm workers' families had emigrated in the previous nine years. The slogan 'three acres and a cow' was coined by the Liberal politician Jesse Collings for his land reform campaign of 1885, and later adapted for use in Joseph Chamberlain's 'Radical Programme'. Chamberlain urged the purchase by local authorities of land 'for the purpose of garden and field allotments to be let at fair rents to all labourers who might desire them, in plots of up to one acre of arable and three or four acres of pasture.' The 'right to dig' became a populist cause and in 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act was passed which led to large scale schemes, and as many as 30,000 families were settled as a result.

During the First World War, Lloyd George and others promised action 'for settling

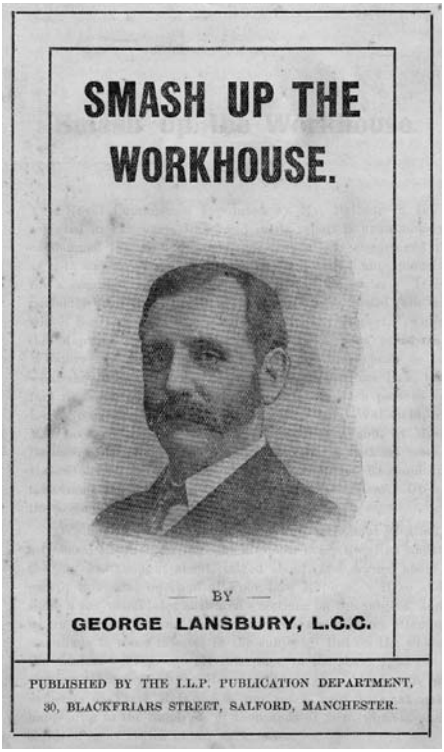
the gallant soldiers and sailors on the land'. The Board of Agriculture drew up plans, and the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association gave advice. After the War, there was an unprecedented growth of settlement on the land. Large estates were broken up and put on the market, and in 1919 the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act was passed. Its provisions came to an end in 1926 but by then the number of statutory smallholdings had doubled and the number of associated houses had quadrupled. Unfortunately, during the 1920s the price of farm produce fell consistently and by 1929 most of those who had moved onto the smallholdings were forced out.

George Lansbury

In 1892 George Lansbury, a pacifist and socialist, who was later to become MP for Bow and Bromley, Mayor of Poplar, and eventually leader of the Labour party, became a member of the Board of Guardians of the Poplar Workhouse. He soon began a policy of relief beyond the workhouse itself, and with support from Joseph Fels, an American philanthropist, established two 'colonies' at Laindon in Essex and Hollesley Bay in Suffolk. The aim of these colonies was to settle unemployed Londoners. Most came from the workhouse, and many were former soldiers. A hundred men were housed in corrugated iron huts and set to digging reservoirs and building chicken huts. The plan was to turn the site into co-operative smallholdings, but the Local Government Board refused to allow this.

Lansbury and his colleagues on the Board of Guardians soon came under fierce attack. They were accused of wasting ratepayers' money, and the government launched an enquiry. The resulting report was critical, but the Board of Guardians refused to back down and eventually the authorities decided not to take action. George Lansbury went on to become a member of the 1905 Royal Commission on the Poor Law and the Unemployed, and a signatory to its minority report which recommended the dismantling of the workhouse system.

Encouraged by the experiments at Laindon and Hollesley Bay, Joseph Fels went on to purchase a 600-acre farm at Mayland in Essex, applying intensive horticultural principles developed by Thomas Smith, who had already established a small socialist colony nearby.



The Land Settlement Association

The depression in the early 1930s led to renewed efforts to create rural communities as an answer to urban unemployment. The main stimulus came from the Quaker Society of Friends. The Friends noticed that allotments were going out of cultivation just as they could be of most value, because the plot-holders lacked money for seed and fertiliser, and those who did grow produce were financially penalised through reduction in welfare benefits.

The Friends Committee obtained a concession from the Ministry of Labour that the value of produce which could be sold from an allotment would not affect the amount of dole received. The Friends went on to advocate the idea of 'group holdings', using plots of land larger than an allotment but smaller than a smallholding. In 1933 pilot schemes were established in County Durham and elsewhere.

Also in 1933, a wealthy Quaker, Malcolm Stewart, offered £25,000 (provided that the government would match this pound for pound) to launch a more ambitious scheme, offering full-time holdings of about five acres for industrial workers. The scheme would also provide them with agricultural training, as well as facilities

Land Settlement at Newbourne, 1964

for marketing their produce. The National Council of Social Service (later NCVO) arranged a meeting with the Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald and the minister of agriculture. The government prevaricated on the question of funding, but encouraged the formation of a body to take the idea forward. The Land Settlement Association was established in 1934, and eventually the government allocated £50,000 on the basis of £1 for every £2 provided by the Association.

Disappointed but undeterred the Association raised grants from independent sources (notably the Carnegie United

Kingdom Trustees). The first estate was at Potton in Bedfordshire, which recruited mining families from County Durham and Northumberland. To support the initiative several county councils leased or sold estates to the Association. By the end of the 1930s the Association held twenty one estates, subdivided into more than one thousand holdings.

The Association encouraged the development of co-operative methods for purchasing, marketing and working arrangements; men and their wives were carefully selected (those who had already worked their own allotments were favoured), and training and supervision were provided. The Association chose carefully where to invest its money, preferring areas with an established tradition of market gardening and rail access to wholesale markets. Typically, there was a home farm occupied by the supervisor, with central buildings for grading and packing, surrounded by about 40 smallholdings of 4-8 acres. Each family was credited with £2,000 to set up the holding, and as well as houses they had pigs, chickens and goats and the option of a 30ft or 40ft greenhouse. It did not work for everyone. Nearly half of those admitted for training (the prerequisite for settlement) returned home before completion or shortly afterwards. The supervisors employed by the Association controlled farming decisions, and this was resented. The Second World War impeded expansion of the programme as vacant plots were ploughed up and specialist advisors were dispersed in the war effort. Many were glad to see this happen. Political factions on the Left and Right opposed land settlement, some thought it went too far, others not far enough. The Manchester Guardian looked forward to the demise of the programme: 'It should help to kill one of the legends that has haunted us since the last war (and for generations before that).'

Nevertheless the Land Settlement Association survived the wartime setbacks, and by the early 1970s average earnings of the Association's tenants were well above the average agricultural wage, although there was considerable variation across the country and even within the estates.

By 1982 there were still 3,900 acres under cultivation, with 530 tenants and 300 staff. The government announced that the tenants should take over responsibility for marketing their produce, but would be allowed to purchase their holdings at half the current market price. Two estates were transformed into co-operatives (Foxash Growers in Essex

and Newbourn Growers in Suffolk), but the others were sold off, amid much acrimony, during the property boom of the early 1980s.

Poets and pacifists

John Middleton Murry, editor of a literary magazine and one-time husband of the New Zealand novelist Katherine Mansfield, bought a farm at Langham in Essex in 1935. This was intended as a training ground for communitarian socialists. The Farm Group, as it came to be known, included Quakers, Plymouth Brethren, Catholics, 'one mild-mannered man who professed himself a Satanist', vegetarians, bicycle club enthusiasts, esperantists and nudists. Such a mixture was inevitably volatile. Murry later described them as a 'chapter of cranks, sexually unfulfilled or frustrated'. He decided not to live there, and installed Max Plowman (a literary critic and expert on the prophetic works of William Blake) as its manager. It did not succeed.

There were many short-lived communities like this at the time of the Second World War, fuelled by 20,000 conscientious objectors, and a further 20,000 'outlaws' who had evaded military service and were without identity cards. Few survived for long.

The growth of a 'community sector'

The first settlements were founded by Oxford and Cambridge colleges in the 1880s, inventing a new profession of social work, campaigning for universal pensions and social security, and emerging as a focus for neighbourhood community action. In 1934, in the deprived community of Brynmawr in South Wales, a community-led regeneration programme was underway, with a community audit, amenity improvements, and community businesses providing work and income. This was perhaps the first development trust. In 1992 the Development Trusts Association was founded, promoting community asset ownership as a means of 'transforming communities for good'. The 2003 'community right to buy' legislation in Scotland and the 2007 Quirk review in England have pushed community assets up the agenda, and there are now over 450 development trusts across the UK with £489m of assets in community ownership.

Settlements

The idea of the original settlements was to create a place where Oxford and Cambridge students, during their holidays, could work among the poor and improve their lives. In effect, part-time missionary work in the darkest East End. The first settlements opened in 1885: Oxford House in Bethnal Green, and Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel. Both were modelled on Oxford colleges, with their own chapels and libraries and at first local working people were forbidden entry. In the early years, there was intense rivalry between Oxford House and Toynbee Hall. The former was the creation of High Church academics at Keble College and the second was inspired by the more secular followers of John Ruskin, such as Henrietta Barnett: there was a pitched battle on the Mile End Road between the followers of the two groups.

Despite this inauspicious start, the settlements soon made far-reaching impacts. They set themselves ambitious goals: scientific research concerning poverty; the furthering of wider lives through education; and an enhancement of leadership in local communities. They gained a reputation for attracting the brightest young social reformers, and

many of the architects of the modern welfare state passed their apprentice years in the 'settlements' movement, including William Beveridge, R. H. Tawney, and Clement Atlee.

In the East End, the settlements played a central role in tackling the appalling conditions within which the majority lived. In the summer of 1896 an epidemic of diphtheria and scarlet fever swept East London and the settlements led the campaign for improved sanitation and water supply. They also fought for local libraries, compulsory registration of lodging houses, and free school milk. The early settlements were closely associated with the Poor Man's Lawyer movement, which originated in 1891 when barrister Frank Tillyard began to give free legal advice to poor applicants at the Mansfield House Settlement in Canning Town. They set great store by education, running evening and university extension classes, hoping to create 'a working man's university'. Albert Mansfield (a former student of Toynbee Hall) established the Workers' Educational Association in 1903. The Passmore Edwards Settlement (now Mary Ward House) pioneered play-work and set up the first play centres in London. It also established a model school for children with physical disabilities. The Women's University Settlement (now the Blackfriars Settlement) began in 1887 with the objective of promoting welfare and giving women and children 'additional opportunities for education and recreation'.

Above all, the early settlements led a campaign for the universal old age pension. In 1883 Canon Barnett at Toynbee Hall advocated pensions of eight or ten shillings a week for all who had kept themselves to the age of 60 without work-house aid. 'If such pensions were the right of all,' he said, 'none would be tempted to lie to get them, nor would any be tempted to spy and bully in order to show the un-desert of applicants.' The Old Age Pensions Act finally came into law in 1909.[59]

The Federation of Residential Settlements was established in 1920, renamed the British Association of Residential Settlements, and later the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres, now known as Bassac.[60] In 1928 the British Association of Residential Settlements, together with the Educational Settlements Association and the National Council of Social Service (now NCVO), formed the New Estates Committee. Thanks to the Housing Act of 1936, it was able to obtain funds from the rates, and thanks to the Carnegie Trust it was able to provide ninety-two

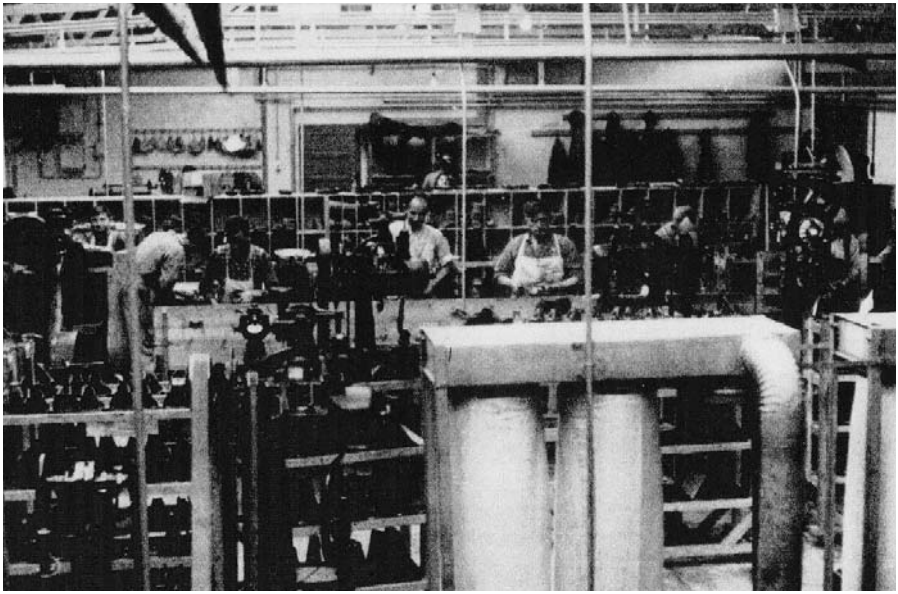
community centres and draw up plans for eighty-two more. In 1945 the national Federation of Community Associations was established, now known as Community Matters.[61]

The settlements were platforms for experiment, enquiry and debate. Lenin attended a debate at Toynbee Hall, Guglielmo Marconi held one of his earliest experiments in radio there, and Pierre de Coubertin was so impressed by the mixing and working together of so many people from different nations that it inspired him to establish the modern Olympic Games. Ghandi stayed at Kingsley Hall for three months in 1931, while conducting negotiations with the British over the future of India. In 1888 Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr visited Toynbee Hall and on their return to the United States they established a similar project, Hull House, in Chicago. The Settlement Movement grew rapidly both in Britain, the United States and the rest of the world, and the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres was founded in 1926.[62]

The Brynmawr Experiment - the first development trust

Few places suffered more in the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s than Brynmawr in South Wales. A few years earlier the closure of collieries had devastated the local economy, and soon poverty was severe by any standards: gardens and allotments were abandoned for lack of seeds, pets were given up for lack of food, public services were reduced to a minimum, and shops closed down because customers were unable to pay for their goods. Hunger marchers took to the road to Newport. The town of Brynmawr was slowly starving.[63]

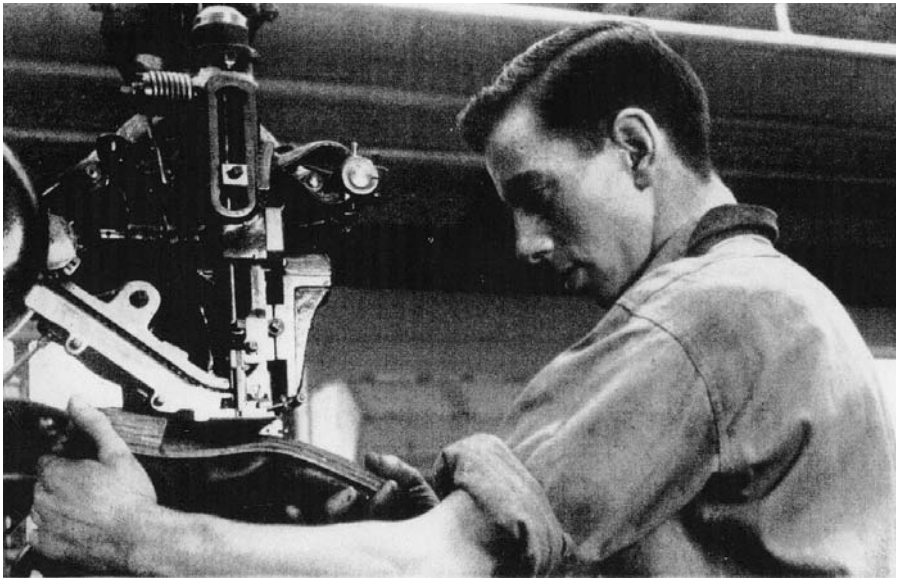
In response to the national emergency and in particular to help the people of Brynmawr, a branch of the Society of Friends (the Quakers) in Worthing set up a Coalfields Distress Committee. Their plan was to alleviate unemployment by developing light industry, and in 1929 a Quaker couple, Peter and Lillian Scott, launched the Order of Friends, based on the principle that work should be controlled by the hands of those engaged in it, and began the Brynmawr Experiment. A community council was set up in Brynmawr to direct activities, and a community survey was undertaken. Local labour was organised to build a



Courtesy: Brynmawr and District Museum Society

swimming bath and paddling pool, and to repair roads, with local men giving their service in exchange for a midday meal. A Subsistence Production Society supplied seeds and manure for allotments. Some of the most malnourished children were housed with families in Worthing for a few months to help them recuperate. Sympathisers in Worthing raised £1,600 for a distress fund. A building was taken over as a Community House and became the base for welfare and social activities including a citizen's advice bureau and over twenty different youth clubs.

In 1931 Brynmawr and Clydach Valley Industries Limited was formed as an umbrella group to create and manage local enterprises and provide work. An appeal was made and stock was issued in hopes of raising £15,000, and by July 1932, £10,000 had been collected. Capital for new companies was raised by issuing shares to the workers in the form of loans from the umbrella group. Surpluses produced by the companies would repay the loans and control of the company would end up in the hands of the shareholders, the workers themselves.



Courtesy: Brynmawr and District Museum Society

Two enterprises, Brynmawr Bootmakers Ltd and Brynmawr Furniture Makers Ltd began production at a converted brewery, Gwalia Works. The furniture was designed by the talented Paul Matt on minimalist Quaker and Arts and Craft principles and quickly established a nationwide reputation. Marketing was undertaken on the most advanced principles, and through promotional leaflets, glossy catalogues and a London showroom, the company sold its message of high quality product and social value. After the outbreak of the Second World War, however, sales declined. It became impossible to import materials, and the furniture enterprise was forced to close. The Brynmawr Bootmakers survived, winning army contracts during the war and becoming fully self-financing.

Peter and Lillian Scott also inspired a small self-sustaining community at Upholland near Wigan, where members were credited according to hours worked and commodities were priced accordingly, reviving the time bank schemes of Josiah Warren and Robert

Owen a hundred years earlier. The price of goods was carefully calculated, taking into account capital outlay, cost of production and estimated yields. For example a jar of jam was assessed at 2 hours and 15 minutes.

Encouraged by the results at Brynmawr and Upholland, the government supported a rapid expansion of the Subsistence Production Society from 1934 to 1938. In the Welsh valleys hundreds of acres were acquired at Llandegveth, Beili Glas, Trevethin, Pontymoile, Griffithstown, Pontnewydd and Cwnbran and Cwnavon. In Lancashire sites were established at Billinge, Parbold Hall, Pemberton and Standish, supported by a grant of £30,000 from the Nuffield Trust. Commercial activities ranged from animal husbandry and market gardening to tailoring, cobbling, butchery, baking, and woodworking. In 1938 the Welsh Valleys Subsistence Production Society recorded production of 242,590 pints of milk, 38,500lbs meat, 360 yards of blankets, and 69,499 concrete bricks.

Altogether around 900 people, mainly men, took part in the schemes in Wales and Lancashire. They remained on unemployment benefit and were not paid, but could take home the product of their labour and barter surplus goods among themselves, without suffering deductions in their dole money. Despite initial hostility from the local Labour party, trade unions and shopkeepers (some participants were stoned on their way to work) the schemes won many admirers, above all from the unemployed themselves. The Brynmawr Experiment became a source of inspiration for the Land Settlement Association.[64]

The development trusts movement

In the 1940s and 1950s there were high hopes that state action (municipal housing, town planning, nationalisation of key industries, universal education, health and welfare services) would eradicate poverty and social inequality. The achievements were indeed huge, but in the 1970s and 1980s came a devastating critique from the community development movement: municipal welfarism was creating a dependency culture and failing the poor.

In 1992 the Development Trusts Association was founded by a small group of strong-willed community practitioners. Some had cut their teeth in the community development or co-operative movement. Others looked overseas to CDCs

(Community Development Corporations) in the United States and to the ideas of community activists such as Saul Alinsky, whose *Rules for Radicals* (1971) set out tactics for community groups to use against opponents vastly superior in power and wealth. Many were also inspired by the work of Paddy Doherty in Northern Ireland, who founded the cross-sectarian Inner City Trust in Derry at the height of the Troubles, and demonstrated that community asset development could be achieved in the most adverse circumstances.

Development trusts were determined that regeneration should be community-led. They were also convinced that enterprise and assets were the means to sustainable regeneration. Acquisition of land and buildings would provide the foundation for community-based economic activities, where profits would be reinvested in social goals. This would restore self-determination, pride and prosperity to communities where the public and private sectors had failed. Gradually these principles were put into practice and a nationwide network of skills and experience developed, with development trusts drawing knowledge and inspiration from the many successes, and occasional failures, of other development trusts.
In Scotland the Land Reform Act 2003 introduced a 'community right to buy' enabling rural communities with a population of less than 10,000 to establish a community body and register an interest in land or buildings, thereby providing the option to buy when the land/buildings come up for sale, following a community ballot. At the same time a Scottish Land Fund was established to assist communities to own and develop land, by funding preparatory costs, acquisition, and development. While the legislation has proved cumbersome to apply, its very existence gave encouragement to many rural communities, especially in the Highlands and Islands, and a series of community land buy-outs has taken place.

In England in 2003 the government issued a General Disposal Consent to local authorities and certain other public bodies allowing them to dispose of land and buildings to community groups at less than 'best consideration' (ie at less than full market price) without the requirement for Secretary of State consent, provided that the undervalue was no more than £2m, and that commensurate benefits of social, economic or environmental well-being will be produced.[65]

In 2004 the government provided £2m to the Adventure Capital Fund, a new community investment initiative

established by a consortium including the Development Trusts Association, to provide patient capital (mixing grants, loans and quasi-equity finance) accompanied by business support for community enterprises. By 2007 a total of £15m was raised by the Adventure Capital Fund from government departments and regional development agencies. In some English regions similar funds were also established, notably the Yorkshire Key Fund. The Big Lottery Fund and independent charitable trusts (notably Northern Rock Foundation, Chase Lankelly Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Carnegie UK Foundation, Tudor Trust) and commercial banks (eg NatWest/RBS and Unity Trust Bank) have also assisted community asset ownership initiatives.

In 2006 the Treasury issued guidance to government departments and other public authorities on 'clawback' rules, making it clear that where public funds had been used to purchase or redevelop community assets, conditions of grant should be applied in ways that, while safeguarding public interest, should avoid reducing the viability of the asset, for example its potential to be used as collateral for further asset development, or for generating earned income for community benefit.[66]

There has been keen interest in community land trust models in recent years, partly because community ownership of land, where increase in land value is retained for community benefit rather than for private gain, has been offered as a solution to the problem of affordable housing. Aside from a few examples within the development trusts movement and elsewhere, often small in scale, practice has to date fallen short of aspiration.

A hundred and fifty years after the Chartists and the early trade unionists first showed the way, the idea of attracting finance for community asset ownership initiatives from within communities themselves, through community bond and share issues, has re-emerged.[67]

In 2006 at its national conference the Development Trusts Association issued a challenge to government to increase the momentum of asset transfer to communities, and as a result Barry Quirk, chief executive of Lewisham Council and the local government 'efficiency champion', was appointed to undertake a review of community management and ownership of assets. The Quirk review was launched in 2007 at the Burton Street Project, a development trust in Sheffield (which with the help of the

Adventure Capital Fund and Sheffield City Council now owns its community building). The Quirk review noted that community asset development was a means to achieve community empowerment, and concluded:

There are risks but they can be minimised and managed – there is plenty of experience to draw on. The secret is all parties working together.[68]

Subsequently government provided £30m for a Community Assets Fund administered by the Big Lottery Fund, to promote asset transfer from local authorities. Government has also worked with the professional associations to improve technical guidance, and has funded 'Advancing Assets', a programme of advice for local authorities and their community partners, led by the Development Trusts Association. In 2008 the government announced the creation of an Asset Transfer Unit, based at the Development Trusts Association. Also in 2008, stimulated by the initiatives in Scotland and England, the Welsh Assembly commissioned a study on community asset transfer from DTA Wales.

While the path to community asset ownership has never been easy nor free of obstacles, recent progress has been encouraging. The DTA's survey in 2008 showed that there are now over 450 development trusts across the UK, with a combined turnover of £240m and assets in community ownership of £489m, serving a quarter of the entire population.[69] Alongside colleagues in the wider community sector and social enterprise sector, development trusts are keeping alive the simple and profound ideas of a tradition that has endured for more than six hundred years.

Further reading

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16. Thomas Spence, *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State*, 1801.
17. Robert Wedderburn, *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 1817
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29. Letter from William Thompson to Anna Wheeler, 1825, quoted in Barbara Taylor, p ix
30. Barbara Taylor, pp 238-260.
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